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She Never Published
Her Novel

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Poland: Instead of Revolution

THE EDITORS
On the Invisible Man
On Crime and Its Remedies

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CORRESPONDENCE

Limping on Israel

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Carroll C. Estes's letter, on "Israel's Disgrace" [March 10], is itself, in my personal opinion, something of a disgrace. Certainly there is much room for criticism of Israeli policies on the West Bank on both moral and international legal grounds. But to accuse Israel of "hideous practices of genocidal destruction" betrays both an ignorance of the events of the Shoah and a willingness to allow one's rhetoric unbridled license. Estes's analogy more than limps. In my view, it is morally obscene and historically vacuous.

EUGENE J. FISHER
Secretariat for
Catholic-Jewish Relations
NCCB

Jesus & the papacy

Milwaukee, Wis.

To the Editors: Philip S. Kaufman's article ["Autocracy Isn't the Catholic Style," February 24] makes a point that deserves to be underscored: No responsible historian nowadays would maintain (at least not with a clear conscience and a straight face) that the present model of church government was established by Jesus or the apostles. The papacy and the church's mechanisms for choosing bishops have changed numerous times, usually in response to changes in the secular world. That very capacity to adapt to changing circumstances has enabled Catholicism to survive over the centuries.

The papacy need not be modeled in the image and likeness of a minor baroque despotism, nor is the pope's autocratic control over the selection of bishops either a necessary or even a particularly long-standing feature of the church's constitution. These patterns of church government, far from being venerable traditions, are relatively recent innovations. They were contrived to shield the church from what nineteenth-century pontiffs perceived as the threats of liberalism and democracy. The election of bishops by the clergy and people of their dioceses is a far more venerable and authentic Catholic tradition than the present procedure. The closing decades of the second Christian millennium might be an opportune time to return to the ancient practice of episcopal election.

JAMES A. BRUNDAGE

History & hope

Chester, Conn.

To the Editors: "Autocracy Isn't the Catholic Style" [February 24] brings out important historical facts which have either been forgotten or, more probably, never known by many Catholics, both clerical and lay. It is high time that the so-called "magisterium," which considers itself to be infallible, should be confronted with a little history.

It is clear that the present pope is continuing the process of centralization and ignoring local authorities in the selection process. Only men who completely share his concepts of orthodoxy will be chosen for the episcopate and the litmus test seems to be an unqualified adherence to *Humanae vitae*. Priests and laity have protested the lack of consultation in the early years of this decade in the Netherlands and more recently in Spain, Austria, Germany, the United States, and, believe it or not, even in Ireland. The point was repeated only last month in the German theologians' protest "The Cologne Declaration" (also in the February 24 issue).

In the United States, the consultative process established by the former apostolic delegate Jean Jadot, with such excellent results, has now been swept aside and authoritarianism has taken over. Episcopal appointments are in effect now made by the papal nuncio, Pio Laghi....

These are dark days for those who had rejoiced when John XXIII threw open the windows. Slowly the institutional church is reverting to the centralized control of Rome, developed under the four Piuses, IX, X, XI, and XII, when the word was *Roma locuta, causa finita*. The result may well be strict adherence by some but a loss of credibility by more.

Let us hope, however, that the Catholics of today will not be as docile as those who in the years before Vatican II either would not or could not speak up. In those days instead of protesting, they just left the church. Today we have a more complete realization that the church encompasses more than just the hierarchy. The clergy and the laity have the right to be heard and to have a part in the process by which their bishops are chosen.

EDMUND T. DELANEY

What authority isn't

Collegeville, Minn.

To the Editors: Father Philip Kaufman distinguishes between authority and autocracy as some of the Holy Father's advisors and critics evidently don't.

J.F. POWERS

Threats to power

New Haven, Conn.

To the Editors: Your excerpt from Philip Kaufman's *Why You Can Disagree...and Remain a Faithful Catholic* [February 24]

(Continued on page 317)

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COMMONWEAL

The invisible man

Ten years ago, no one could have imagined a scenario in which a Soviet leader addressing the UN offers ideas closely resembling proposals advanced by the popes of Rome: greater authority for the UN; significant steps toward disarmament; multilateral efforts toward third-world development. Couldn't happen. Did.

There have been deeds as well as words. In the Soviet setting, *perestroika* and *glasnost* are new things under the sun. Other policies are changing. Jewish emigration rises. Control of military planning and spending appears to be shifting to civilians. Soviet military journals discuss such concepts as "mutual defensive superiority," "nonoffensive defense," "minimum nuclear deterrence." Soviet troops and tanks are out of Afghanistan and on the move (some of them) out of Eastern Europe; Soviet diplomacy has favored peaceful settlements in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia; Soviet adventurism is out of style.

Only for the moment? Who knows? Mikhail Gorbachev is neither immortal nor all-powerful. He faces problems as massive as the Caucasus: economic stagnation, bureaucratic lethargy, ethnic and nationalist stirrings throughout the Soviet bloc. Gorbachev himself is not a fully known quantity; no one has measured his capacity for ruthlessness should he decide that failure of his policies calls for aggressive diversions abroad. So far Soviet actions do not yet match the reach of its leader's words. And they are reversible.

In this time of uncertainty, some in the West convert the possible failure of *perestroika* to a near-certainty. To others, the chance that Gorbachev will succeed is at least as fearful. Pundits warn that "Gorbymania" is already splitting NATO; that the West Germans are being enticed into secession from the alliance—overtly out of revulsion against a deterrence policy that makes the two Germanys the nuclear battlefield of choice, but also, say some, out of the reviving dream of reunification.

What should the U.S. be saying? In his response to West German interest in East-West negotiations over short-range missiles, President Bush has little to say but "No." Politically and militarily, it's a disastrously wrong answer. Even if the Lance missiles now in place were *unilaterally* eliminated (not what Bonn is proposing), NATO would still command an enormous and varied array of nuclear weapons. The NATO policy preferred by U.S. and U.K. hardliners, replacement of the Lance by an upgraded missile, is seen by the West Germans, along with many others in the West, as an effort to reverse the momentum toward nuclear arms control symbolized by the INF treaty. The Lance is an expendable *quid* for which the Soviets may well pay a massive *quo*—they field far more short-range missile launchers than does NATO.

What else does the administration have to say about U.S. policy in the Gorbachev era? Thus far the answer appears to be "nothing" or "nothing for a while yet." The

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president has made no public comments about his attitude toward START negotiations; about possible U.S. aims in negotiations over conventional arms; about the prodigious resources of every kind that can be turned to peaceful, productive, security-building uses when the two overarmed alliances reduce their capacity for war.

This stance is described as an exercise of caution, made necessary by the administration's ongoing policy review, justified by the high stakes and the multitude of factors involved. The stakes are indeed high and the complexity is real. But paralysis is not caution. Endless policy review is no way to seize the historical moment.

George Bush has been at or near the center of power in this country not for months but for decades, with total access to information, with every opportunity and an obligation to think and take counsel about America's future course. In his campaign Bush asserted his foreign policy experience as a principal asset. After describing the president the electorate should choose, he said, "I am that man." But that man remains as invisible as he has been depicted in "Doonesbury." Mikhail Gorbachev strides the world stage alone, seemingly in charge of the only microphone that reaches public opinion West or East. Meantime, George Bush, though he now occupies the Oval office, relaxes at Camp David, and flies about in Air Force One, has not yet risked becoming president.

CRIME & ITS REMEDIES

Even now, weeks after the incident, the story has a piercing senselessness. On the evening of April 19 a group of thirty or so teenagers from Harlem set out for some "fun" in Central Park. It turned into a series of assaults on several bicyclists and joggers. By 10 P.M., a dozen of the youths had raped, sodomized, and beaten a woman jogger beyond recognition and left her for dead. Now she lies in a hospital in critical condition and a handful of teenagers are facing charges of attempted murder, their lives derailed. Even New York City, so well-acquainted with violence, is bewildered by the brutality and the incomprehensibility of the assault. People search fruitlessly for explanations.

If the boys had been on drugs or out for cash and credit cards...If they had been poverty-stricken, with criminal pasts and no future to lose, we might be able to understand. Four of the six indicted boys do not live in poverty, but in a middle-class building with a doorman. They seem to come from stable, caring homes. One boy's father is regarded locally as a role model; one boy's mother struggles to send him to a Catholic school; another boy goes to a small alternative high school; the boys are active in organized sports and music. They had decent housing and education; interested, hard-working parents; religious families. All of the ingredients were there—the ingredients that our society agrees should lead to bright and useful futures for our children.

How is it then, that, when the psychology of "the group" began to take over—when the teens chased a couple on a tandem or struck a male jogger with a pipe, or gagged the young woman and dragged her off the running path—not one of these promising youths tried to brake the momentum?

More vain efforts at explanation: Peer pressure is always a potent force in adolescence and running as a pack heightens it. Alienation, despair, and rage against society can run deep among young people, who find themselves surrounded by a violent drug culture that challenges every important value they may have been taught at home. Brutality is part of survival in this culture. Self-expression can become unbridled license to act any way one chooses, regardless of its effect on others. In a city riddled by racial tensions, racial hostility, conscious or not, was probably a factor in the attack. So, obviously, was gender.

Each of these may contribute to an explanation of the crime, but they fall short. Everyone pursues rational explanations because to explain is perhaps to control, is perhaps to prevent. But finally the want of explanation, of control, of security in this case confronts us with the one element that policymakers and policemen, educators and parents always hope to keep at bay—the human capacity for evil. These young men made choices—irrational and inexplicable—for which the law should make them pay, but that is not the final remedy for their wanton act. Our immense capacity to do wrong may be tempered by better housing, better laws, better schools, better parents—may be. But these fail and we fail; then contrition, repentance, and reconciliation are the necessary remedies.

HEAVENLY PEBBLES

The Bush administration, through its then-designated Secretary of Defense, John Tower, declared in January that the goal of President Reagan's Star Wars dream was unreachable: You can't devise a full-proof umbrella to protect the entire U.S. population from nuclear attack. Why then, does the administration still insist on trying?

Now the real Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, says that the Bush administration will be seeking a mere $4.6 billion for SDI research and development this year. That is short of the Reagan request ($5.7 billion), but up nearly a billion from last year's $3.7 billion appropriation. What does Secretary Cheney want the money for? For an SDI umbrella that he calls the "Brilliant Pebble" project. It is the latest brainchild of physicist Lowell L. Wood, who along with Edward Teller, earlier sold Mr. Reagan on another Star Wars weapon, a massive X-ray space laser that failed to materialize.

Mr. Wood proposes to throw 10,000 to 100,000 small interceptor rockets into space (plus decoys, perhaps)—each with a keen eye and its own zapping power—to knock out Soviet missiles after they blast off. President Bush's thousand points of light gone astral? If we are to believe Cheney, Brilliant Pebbles now has the inside track as SDI's future component of choice.

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Give Commonweal for Graduation

The same objections that should have collapsed the SDI umbrella when Mr. Reagan proposed it in the first place apply to Brilliant Pebbles now. (Recall the 1985-report of the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment that said SDI did not appear feasible and could increase the risk of a nuclear war.) Those objections need to be repeated and applied specifically to Brilliant Pebbles: The system will be vulnerable to Soviet counter measures; it will depend on unproven technology; it will not be full-proof; it may cause a traffic jam of orbiting materials in space; it will cost more than advertised; its deployment is likely to encourage rather than prevent a first strike; it will violate provisions of the 1972 ABM Treaty; it will set back other arms control agreements as a result.

At the same time he made his presentation on Star Wars, Mr. Cheney indicated he was delaying the procurement of more Stealth bombers. "I'm not comfortable with the program yet," he said. "There are a lot of technical problems with it and it is extremely expensive." We suggest Secretary Cheney apply the same criteria to his heavenly pebbles.

REPORT FROM POLAND

INSTEAD OF REVOLUTION

PROSPECTS FOR POWER SHARING

The agreement signed on April 5 by Solidarity with the Polish government represents a truly historic compromise. Seven years after banning Solidarity, Poland's Communist leaders have agreed to share their monopoly of power with it. The Communist party is to hold a marginal majority in the lower house of Parliament, while free elections will decide the composition of the reestablished Senate. Lech Walesa talks of running for president only a few years after being the most famous persona non grata in the country. He is taken seriously by all parties.

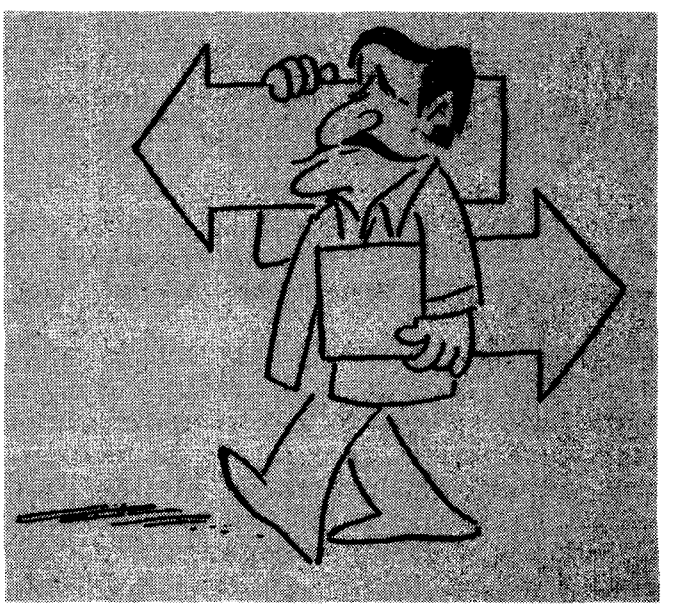
Yet, only a few hundred people cheered a tired Walesa and his negotiating team when they left the government building after concluding two months of marathon talks—an apparent contrast to the enthusiastic thousands who acclaimed the union leader in 1980 and 1981. Though Lech Walesa still enjoys enormous popularity, the symbolism of that moment was quite obvious.

Having entered Polish politics as an official force, Solidarity will have to seek popular support not through Walesa's charisma, but through an electoral mandate for its candidates and policies. But, Solidarity candidates are aware that cooperation with the government is going to cost them the support of the opposition-left and radical union factions. Prominent Solidarity members such as Andrzej Gwiazda or Jerzy Kropiwnicki, splinter groups called "Fighting Solidarity," and the radical movement, "Committee for Independent Poland," have openly criticized Walesa. They will try to persuade younger and more impatient members of the opposition to boycott Solidarity's candidates.

Accepting electoral challenge may be even riskier for the Communist party than for Solidarity. Token parliamentary opposition candidates of the Polish Peasant Party (ZSL), the Democratic Front (SD), Pax (Catholic Front), and the Christian-Social Union, together with Solidarity candidates, are likely to leave embarrassingly few seats for the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) in the Senate. Moreover, local bureaucrats accustomed to party protection will have to seek democratic endorsement or leave their jobs and privileges. Mid-level security personnel, judges, and prosecutors will be accountable before the legislative branch of the government, while apostate Communist party liberals will be challenged by conservatives.

Observers of Polish compromise wonder: Who has won? Which side has shown more political and tactical foresight and who, ultimately, is going to gain more from the agreement?

One immediate benefit for the government is clear. President Bush has proposed an economic package to ease Poland's debt crisis. In addition, obtaining credits from the World Bank and IMF, and gaining admission to GATT, represent no small prize for the government. An independent union, actively and credibly soliciting Western loans, could be a tactical ploy used by the government to shift responsibility for dealing with the country's debt onto the shoulders of labor. If new credits are offered by the Western governments in response to a plea by Lech Walesa, the union leader may be asked in Bonn or Washington to offer an implicit guarantee that the Polish government is not going to spend it on inefficient steel plants or dachas for the *nomenklatura*, or allow it to be eaten up by wage inflation.



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The risks for Solidarity are high. If the union is going to take an active part in the economic reform, it will have to reconcile macroeconomic probity with the traditional functions of the trade union. Independent labor leaders will have to tell workers that strikes are bad; that a market solution to the crisis will require free, but higher, prices; that reform will mean shutting down inefficient plants, which will mean unemployment. This is not going to add popularity to the union. It may, perhaps, create an unusual collusion of interest between the opposition-left and the party hard-liners.

What are the prospects for this unusual concordat? Some predict that four years from now the Communists will lose the elections, but then refuse to yield power to Solidarity. If so, confrontation would be unavoidable. However, the zero sum situation that dominated Polish politics in 1981 does not necessarily apply today. At the time of future elections, the situation may look quite different. Much can change in four years. Solidarity may become more polarized, but so will the party.

In 1981, the party demanded Solidarity's self-limitation using the threat of Soviet invasion. However, such self-limitation now may come for both sides from democratic mechanisms. The ascent to power of Mikhail Gorbachev has meant that conservatives have lost their legitimacy as the executors of plausible limits imposed by the Kremlin; liberals have already realized that their survival is going to depend on power sharing. For their part, Solidarity is not likely to choose revolution after evolutionary means have restored its official existence.

The agreement between the party and Solidarity may have many shortcomings, but it is viable. Party liberals accept the fact that there is an independent society in exchange for Solidarity's willingness to partake in the elections. This solution to power sharing will not mean an end to all strikes after the elections, but probably will mean fewer of them; it will not mean that independent candidates will be able to win the support for all their reform proposals, but for most of them; it will mean that Solidarity will have not ten million members, but considerably fewer.

On balance, the overall effectiveness of the power structure—with participating opposition—is going to improve considerably. A likely future scenario is for political choice outside the party and Solidarity to broaden as new parties substitute for the bloc presently controlled by the party. A new majority based on a coalition of liberal Communists and Solidarity candidates could become part of a center capable of providing electoral support for the reforms by requiring compromise of all parties involved.

What will happen to those among the party *nomenklatura* who will lose their positions? Marketization and privatization will offer them an alternative to join the new class of socialist capitalists. There, they will meet many of today's union members who will find out that the private sector can provide them with a better opportunity for material and personal satisfaction than the state sector. Moreover, the transformation of state ownership into worker ownership, which Solidarity is likely to promote, will defuse some industrial conflicts and create a new class of career managers and professionals outside the party *nomenklatura*.

Paradoxically, the possibilities for the transition of power described here were not created in Warsaw, but in Moscow. Gorbachev is the first Soviet leader to understand that the strongest forces for reform are antitotalitarian; without them *perestroika* in the socialist world is impossible. In this sense, Poland is the first East European Communist country to take advantage of the winds of democracy blowing from Russia.

MIRON J. WOLNICKI

Miron J. Wolnicki teaches economics at Villanova University. He is a former member of Solidarity and emigrated to the U.S. in 1981.

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

HEALTH: THE GREAT ESCAPE

DEATH IS AS TERRIBLE AS IT SEEMS

Health is something I think about intensely—but only fitfully. I think I'm like most Americans that way. I watch my diet for weeks at a time, then eat bacon, Mexican and Italian sausages, hot dogs, everything bad for me. I exercise regularly, gave up smoking years ago, and when I am in Europe I feel smug, downright superior to all those Europeans who still smoke.

Some of this inconsistent health consciousness has to do with my being in my forties, no doubt. Whatever fitness I have began with a middle-age bad back that could be helped by exercise, and was, and then I got into the habit of feeling better in more general ways and kept it up.

My experience has led me to two basic conclusions: First, young people should do what I did. When you are young you should get as little exercise as possible, smoke, and drink too much. Then, when your clean-living contemporaries are beginning to experience the pull of gravity (which, after all, will win in the long run), you should give up smoking, be temperate in drink, watch your diet, and exercise. You will feel better than you ever did in high school and college, while they will feel much worse, because they have always done the right thing and now, nature taking its course, the right thing isn't working as well as it once did. Second, understand that this is a very temporary pleasure. You are going to die anyway, no matter how much you work at being healthy.

This latter lesson is one I wonder about. I don't mean that I wonder whether I am

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going to die, or whether you are, but whether a lot of people really know that. I once heard a woman say of a man who had been in a near fatal car crash in which his brain was extensively damaged, "Why can't the doctors fix him?" A friend of mine hears of people in their seventies dying of cancer and wonders what in the environment could have caused it. While this is, as far as it goes, a legitimate question, there is in her questioning a suggestion that if something hadn't intervened these people might have lived forever.

There is even a bizarre life extension movement which is actually looking for ways to assure physical immortality. Some of its members are believers in cryonic suspension, and have made arrangements to be frozen immediately after death so that in the future, when scientists have figured out how to revive and fix people, they can wander around for a few more years, waiting for the next technology to give them an even longer stretch of life. (One cheaper way offered by some promoters of cryonics is to have your head frozen—I'm not making this up—so that it can be attached to a future body, either one that has been made fresh, or a donor corpse. But what if they learn enough to revive heads, but not enough to attach them to bodies? That would give a whole new meaning to the idea of being left on the shelf.)

There is a good, solid argument to be made for some attention to health. It does make life more pleasant to feel pretty good, physically; and if, through diet and exercise, I can avoid or at least help prevent some forms of cancer, or a stroke which might debilitate me, or a heart condition which could make my old age more miserable than it is likely to be in any event, it makes sense to be careful about diet and to exercise. And of course there is St. Paul's counsel: our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we should not abuse them.

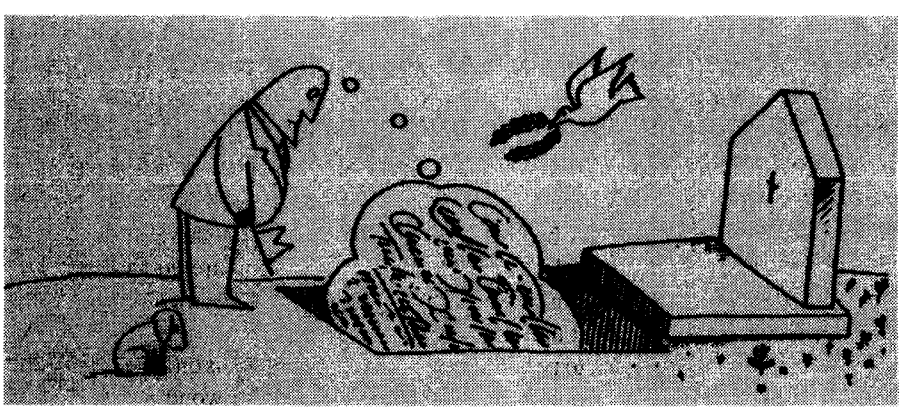
However, behind much of the new concern for health and fitness there is a strange fear, even despair. The fear of death is part of this, and so is a terror of limitation, and a desire always to be in control of our lives. It is understandable to fear death, for the simple reason that it means leaving everything we have known, not knowing what we'll find—if we find anything at all. I realize that as a Christian I affirm a belief that life everlasting is possible, and it is my hope that I will be part of it. But in all of us that hope is mixed with some fear that it may not be so, after all. I think most of us understand the agonized father in the Gospels who, asked by Jesus if he believes, cries "I believe—but help my unbelief."

In fact, whatever our fears and whatever we do to allay them, we will die. This has a meaning less for our future life than for the present one. What does that fact mean to us? To try to extend our lives indefinitely—or to take it to the absurd extremes of the people who aim at physical immortality—is a form of despair. It is a belief that the absolute limit with which death confronts us exists only to cancel us out; it is an enemy, to be fought. From this point of view, the only meaning our life has is on this side of the limit, and everything must be done to keep us here.

This is certainly an understandable reaction. Life is, to put it mildly, a powerful reminder of how utterly contingent, and finally helpless, we are. Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus; and at Gethsemane, when he thought of what awaited him, "his soul was filled with dismay and dread." Death is terrible, and it is not the job of Christianity to reconcile us to it, but to bring us to a belief that its power has been defeated. The Orthodox Easter liturgy exults in the fact that "Christ has risen from the dead, trampling down death by death." But to say that death is terrible is not to say that the best alternative to it is life as we know it, or that this life is the only alternative. In fact this life is so saturated with death that we are often unable to see the fact, until some profound experience—perhaps of love or grief or joy or, most rare of all, real stillness—reveals the ordinarily inert, nearly comatose, nature of ordinary consciousness. It sometimes takes a shock to reveal the usual hardness of our hearts, and only prayer and meditation can bring us to a knowledge of how perpetually distracted from the moment we usually are.

It is this distracted, busy life that life-extension advocates want to preserve, the more unreflective of them indefinitely. The despair implicit in this position is that this life is seen as the most meaningful life, in fact the only kind of life, available to us. Christianity says that death is as terrible as it seems, that we are not wrong to fear it—but even death can be used by God to grant life, and the life we now experience is even in its best moments only a dim foreshadowing of what we are encouraged to hope for.

It is fascinating to see how something literally unimaginable, like death, can have such power over what we do imagine, and fear, and hope for. (When I say that death is unimaginable I mean that all we know of it is what we see of the effects of its coming—other people dying, struggling to live—or of its having happened. We have no way of knowing what it is like to die or be dead. As Wittgenstein said, death is not an experience we live through). Our reactions to death reveal something of what we feel about the unknowable. Is reality finally gracious, or hostile? Is meaning a human symptom? Or is it to be found beyond us, in what we cannot know (or anyway know now)? Our reactions to questions of that sort reveal, perhaps, the most basic differences between believers and nonbelievers. □



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OPUS IN A DRAWER

ON HAVING WRITTEN AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL

MARYLEE MITCHAM

Although I don't know it to be true—I imagine it is—I am one of many women with the completed manuscript of an unpublished novel packed away someplace getting older and older after the fashion of all created things. Perhaps we are inclined to think of ourselves as failed writers because we lack a large forum for that work, not to mention fame and riches. But I am here to report I don't feel failed, which seems like a genuine sign I am not. On the contrary, finishing a novel to one's own satisfaction is quite an accomplishment; I did it. As with other past accomplishments, that knowledge still offers strength for the present journey.

Titled *Hannah Wolfe's Blacktime Song*, it was begun in my late thirties at a very difficult time in my life. I remember counting off the stresses I was under: my mother is dying, my marriage is in crisis, I'm adjusting to my children's adolescence, our house is too small—there's nowhere in it for me to write the novel I *really want* to write.

My first, and up until that time, only attempt to write a novel had been years earlier as a senior in college. I finished sixty pages of a story, whose title I forget, about two women, one a conscientious graduate student named Margaret and the other a 1960s hippie named Kate. I vaguely remember Kate cutting her toenails in front of company and using four-letter words with the abandon I could not. But all too soon the story sprawled past my technical and emotional limits. That was probably 1964. I calculate it was ten years later when I fed it to the flames in self-defeat, conscious of the drama of burning my past, but ignorant of the damage.

By the time I started *Hannah* in 1979, my only profit from that first attempt was a certain comfort in realizing Kate and Margaret had coalesced into one woman. Maybe now I had it in me to finish what I started, in spite of the fact that my circumstances were more difficult than before.

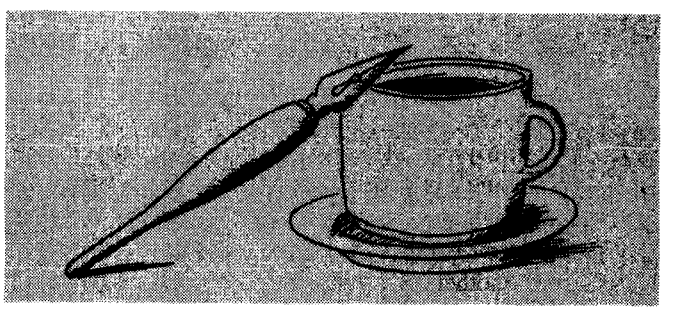
To give him credit, I owe the actual start of that story to my husband because it would not have occurred to me to extend, by three or four days, an out-of-state visit to my mother. He took over family life and I checked into an off-season resort where I hunkered down to write in both pain and bliss.

One of my complaints had been that I didn't even have a desk, for God's sake. But in my stopover cottage I had one and felt too intimidated to call it mine. I sat on the bed as usual and began the first of forty pages that later I filed away as unsuitable. I had given Hannah a husband, unwittingly setting in motion a compulsive re-creation of my own marital discord. This might have been fine if that's what I wanted to write about, but I didn't. I wanted something larger. And another problem, the husband I created on paper was not only a bigger bully than mine, but clumsily drawn as well, a real stick figure. It didn't take long to decide Hannah was single. I made her a mother, but her small daughter had been born *out* of wedlock.

When she was small, one of my real daughters drew a family and pointed its members out to me. "There's the little girl, there's the teenager girl, there's the mommy, and that's the daddy." I was mortified to see an Egyptian coffin standing upright in place of the father. "I guess the father's dead?" I offered, in a small guilty voice. "He's not dead," she replied. "See, I just drew him that way because I can't draw boys."

Now I know what she meant. I discovered I was no good at making men come to life, a fact that meant whenever I created one, I had to use a lot of tricks. This may have exercised my imagination but it certainly cramped my style. And definitely limited my future as a novelist.

It took me six months to complete a first draft of 150 pages, but three years to do the rewrite. Still, that first draft demanded most. I had a hazy idea of where I was going, but inevitably the day's writing produced something new to take into account.



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Hannah (and her daughter, Meadow) became preternaturally real to me. We became friends; I feel it still. We worked the story out together, making it as beautiful, funny, and intrepid as we could the second time through. I think Hannah and I were both searching for God, if you will—she in the exigencies of plot and I in the right to the use of power.

To write this article, I pulled out the manuscript. I must admit I still love it, though in the six years since it's been finished, a stack of editors and agents have gently said no. The work, though praised, is apparently "not quite a novel." Yet it is all-of-a-piece, and therein lies my pleasure. It is flawed, but strangely complete, so I read it without embarrassment or the urge to apologize for its defects.

As a family document alone, it was worth the effort. I thumb the pages and think: here I have a net or a sieve; I have captured pieces of the past that were too small to have survived on their own. For instance, there's the song I once overheard my child composing. It was given to Meadow.

Oh my coffee is too hot
so I put some salt in it
to cool it down
Now my coffee is too salty
oh oh oh

So I put some sugar in it
to take away the salt
and now
my coffee is too salty
and too sweet
oh oh oh

So I put some butter in it
(margarine will do just fine)
to thicken it up
and now
my coffee is too cold
it's too salty and too sweet
it's too thick and I wish
I'd left it like it was
oh oh oh

And in the mouth of Hannah I put a song written in my sleep, something I sat up in bed singing loudly. I may have been tongue-tied by day, but in the middle of the night I woke up rhyming "cliffs of Tuscany" with "your sub-lim-ity." Who wouldn't want to remember that? A spiteful inner voice answers "No one," but *forget* that voice. Not only were small important things preserved, they were given the comeliness of greater order.

Then you ask, not spitefully I'm sure, why don't you write another novel? My reply is based on well-digested past experience: I could, and I may. But perhaps I won't. I suspect that fiction is not my calling. It called for a time and I answered, but I don't really hear it anymore.

Last April another daughter, now grown, asked me if she could read the well-worn manuscript. Here is part of what she said in a letter afterwards. "I enjoyed *Hannah Wolfe's Blacktime Song*. It made me feel very peaceful somehow at the end. I thought it described perfectly how sometimes things and people in life seem so askew and mysterious and strange until you adjust how you're viewing them, and then suddenly things are clear and focused." Exactly.

So *gracias a Dios* for the Muse and her song, for harmony in all its forms, for the words packed away in my trunk, for the ones printed here, and for the eloquence of sheer existence beyond all words. Listening with pleasure, I nod yes to it all. □

Anne Porter

Living Things

Our poems
Are like the wart-hogs
In the zoo
It's hard to say
Why there should be such creatures

But once our life gets into them
As sometimes happens
Our poems
Turn into living things
And there's no arguing
With living things
They are
The way they are

Our poems
May be rough
Or delicate
Little
Or great

But always
They have inside them
A confluence of cries
And secret languages
And always
They are improvident
And free
They keep
A kind of sabbath

They play
On sooty fire-escapes
And window-ledges

They wander
Into jails and gardens
They sparkle
In the deep mines
They sing
In breaking waves
And in wooden cradles.

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FATHERS & THEIR SONS

WILLIAM KENNEDY'S HERO-TRANSGRESSORS

DANIEL M. MURTAUGH

William Kennedy's three novels of Albany during the Great Depression—*Legs*, *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, and *Ironweed*—celebrate heroes who are exemplary types of marginal Americana, a gangster, a hustler, and a bum. Their memory lives in transcendent gestures—a dance, the toss of a bowling ball, the hurling of a mortally accurate smooth round stone—that evoke an eloquence in the author (or his surrogate narrator) that mocks itself for being merely verbal.

The heroic gestures of these three protagonists lift them from the drab mundane into the world of imagination. Not their own imaginations, necessarily. In the first two books, Jack "Legs" Diamond and Billy Phelan shine most brightly in the imaginations of deeper thinkers, the lawyer Marcus Gorman and the journalist Martin Daugherty, who admire them, make them present to us, and convey a troubled sense that this liberated heroism is also isolated, egotistically cut off from the obligations that ensnare the rest of us in family, community, and religion.

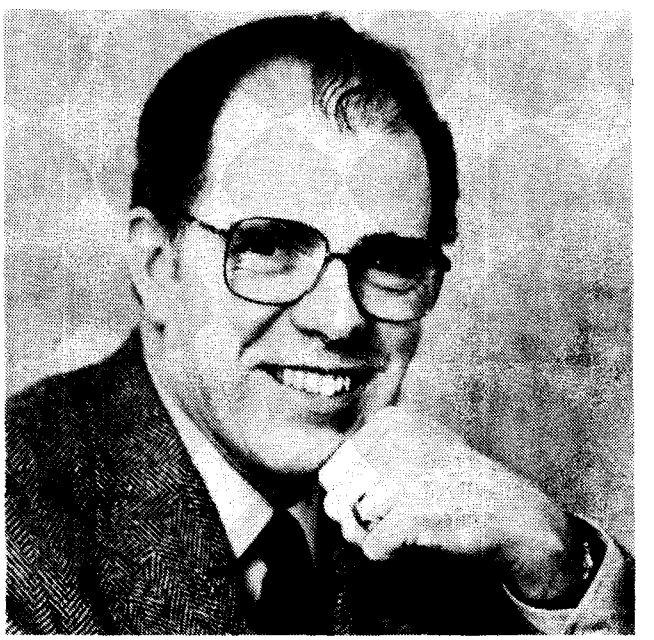
All of these men are Catholics, and, although the practice of their faith is (to put it kindly) in abeyance, the heroism that Legs and Billy embody and Gorman and Daugherty admire tends finally to be expressed in religious language. They look back to the Gospels read at Mass, to the stories and illustrations in the family Bible, to the sacramental life, in short, to all of those adumbrations of a state of grace against which they must measure the self-made grace of the hero.

On self-made grace, observe Jack Diamond as he dances the Charleston in the Catskills with his mistress Kiki Roberts:

> Jack looked at her and his feet began to move, left out, right kick, right back, left back basic, guarded, then "C'mon, dance," Kiki urged, and he gave up his consciousness of the crowd and then left out, right kick, right back, left back expanded, vitalized and he was dancing, arms swinging, dancing, Jack Diamond, who seemed to do everything well, was dancing the Charleston and the Black Bottom, dancing them perfectly, the way all America had always wanted to be able to dance them—energetically controlled, as professionally graceful as his partner who had danced these dances for money in Broadway shows, who had danced them for Ziegfeld; and now she was on the mountaintop with the king of the mountain, and they were king and queen of motion together, fluid with Fogarty's melody and beat.

On the other hand, observe Diamond's feral hit man, Murray the Goose, as he worries a rival to near-death with his steel tipped shoes:

> Murray kicked him in the kneecap and he went down. Murray kicked him in the groin, creased his face, crunched his nose with the side of his shoe. He danced around Charlie, kicking elbows, ribs, shins, calves, and thighs, kicking ass and back and then kicking Charlie's face lightly, left foot, right foot, lightly, but still a kick, drawing blood, rolling the head from side to side like a leaky soccer ball.



DANIEL M. MURTAUGH, *a director of the Commonweal Foundation, works in the Treasurers Division of W. R. Grace & Co.*

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One of the rival's mistakes had been to laugh at Jack's dancing.

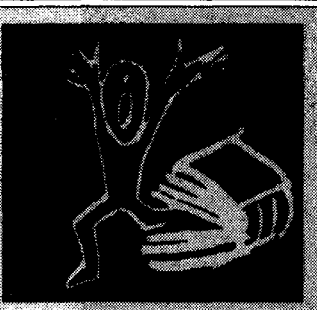
The two passages repay a closer inspection. The first thing that strikes us is that Kennedy is a writer who does not shrink from the grand verbal gesture. He repeats forms of "dance" ten times to create an asymmetrical free-verse rhythm that reaches out from the first "small dimensioned movements" to sweep "all America," defined as Broadway shows and Ziegfeld, into itself. An era finds its icon on a mountaintop, where Yeats asked how we can know the dancer from the dance. Jack looks at Kiki "and his feet began to move." But the gesture that transcends volition is also merely outside of volition. Its mere mechanism can be emptied of one sort of meaning and filled with another. Murray the Goose, "left foot, right foot," is also a stylish high-kicker.

Kennedy is fascinated with gestures and objects whose talismanic power to embody large meanings is a consequence of their having no inherent meaning of their own. Jack, for example, carries and occasionally fingers a rosary. It is a memento of his mother, and he scrutinizes what looks like hieroglyphics on its silver crucifix for a coded message from her, until the hieroglyphics yield their true meaning: "scratches." As empty of significance as the Our Fathers and Hail Marys that he mutters, the scratches nevertheless remain powerful signifiers of Jack's sense of the ultimate mystery of his own being, a sense that is endorsed by the adulation that the world pays him as its hero-outlaw.

Billy Phelan's Greatest Game and *Ironweed* take place seven years after the events of *Legs*, and at about the same time as one another. *Legs* has a gaudy, public air as its mythical hero projects his glamour from Albany and the Catskills across the nation and the world. The two later novels are more centered in the life of the city. Indeed, the city is a kind of organism, a central character in both. The historical context (the Spanish Civil War and Orson Welles's "War of the Worlds" broadcast) impinges on the life of the city and is absorbed into the shared consciousness of its inhabitants. Where *Legs* radiates, *Billy Phelan* and *Ironweed* concentrate in a way that recalls the treatment of Dublin in *Ulysses*.

The heroes of the two novels are a son and his father, Billy and Francis Phelan, a hustler and a bum. They wind their ways through the streets of Albany to a tentative reunion with one another. They are both "on the street" in the sense of being shut out of their homes by troubles large and small. Being on the street means being at the mercy of the random eddies of urban life, especially the life of the night. (Again, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom adrift in Dublin.) Only to the estranged does the life of the modern city reveal itself, and in doing so it tests and proves the most essential qualities of the hero.

While this begins to sound like the function of an enchanted forest in a fairy tale, it is to Kennedy's credit that his Albany serves this function without losing its gritty particularity. It is a magical setting. The magic consists in something as simple as the contrasts in the urban night between being outdoors and



Daniel J. Murtaugh's critical essay on William Kennedy is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's works, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of a William Kennedy have to tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? Previous articles in the series include Rosemary Booth on Mary Gordon (August 12, 1988), John B. Breslin on Andre Dubus (December 2, 1988), and Robert E. Hoemer on Muriel Spark (April 21, 1989).

indoors, between the cold exterior darkness and the warm, smoky, close interior light. Kennedy draws on all we remember about the hero tested by the night forest before reaching the enchanted castle, or about the wise and foolish virgins whose judgment in the outer darkness determines their access to the warmth and light of the feast within.

Billy's problems culminate in his being shut out of the bars and poolrooms that are his milieu as a hustler. They are controlled by the political machine he has offended (in ways I'll get to). Ultimately, he triumphs.

> ...Billy went out into the early freeze that was settling on Broadway and made a right turn into the warmth of the stairs to Louie's room, a place where even serious men sometimes go to seek the meaning magical webs, mystical coin, golden birds, and other artifacts of the only cosmos in town.

By the time we get to it, the extravagance of this paragraph is thoroughly earned.

Although they deal with separate sequences of events, the two Phelan novels are chronologically intertwined. A few days encompass them both, and they end on the same day, as Kennedy makes clear by pointed references to Billy's first wearing of a new hat in both novels. Their structure and method, however, are strikingly different, determined by the tasks of their protagonists. Billy's task in *Greatest Game* is to behave with honor in a field of action, so his story is a plot with threads diverging and recrossing in a labyrinth. Francis's task in *Ironweed* is recognition and atonement. His story is a series of visions and encounters with the living and the dead.

Billy Phelan's Greatest Game is about "the inescapable presence of the absence of fathers." This is the phrase of Martin Daugherty, a character who, though not the narrator, is close enough to give voice to Kennedy's more complicated reflections. Daugherty is a journalist.

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Daugherty's now senile father, Edward, was a playwright who wrote a play about Billy Phelan's father, Francis, and his murderous toss of a stone at a scab in a trolley strike. That event set Francis on his life of running away, and the elder Daugherty saw in the episode, and in the young Francis Phelan, archetypes of the struggle of the immigrant Irish. He wrote another play about the scandal of his own adulterous affair with an actress. In the course of the novel Francis returns to Albany, and the actress also comes back in a triumphant revival of Edward's play. She is cast not as her former self, but as Martin's mother. Offstage, she resumes an affair with Martin, whose genuinely religious sensibility expresses itself in occasional sacrilege.

Martin is the perfect foil for Billy Phelan. Steeped in historical complication, haunted by prophetic dreams, Martin is Homer to Billy's Achilles. He contemplates writing about Billy's near perfect game at the Knights of Columbus bowling alley:

> He would point out how some men moved through the daily sludge of their lives and then, with a stroke, cut away the sludge and transformed themselves. Yet what they became was not the result of a sudden act, but the culmination of all they had ever done: a triumph of self-development, the end of something general, the beginning of something specific.

Self-development has been thrust upon Billy because his father abandoned him. This fascinates Martin, who feels he has not measured up to his own father's achievements, and who is disappointed in his son who attends a junior seminary, embracing the institutional religion that Martin prides himself at having (almost) cast off. Billy is unencumbered by the ghosts that haunt the fathers and sons around him. His sensibility is practical, focused on solving immediate, real problems. He acts with the unreflective authority of a classical hero and faces a classical hero's dilemma.

The son of the political boss of Albany is kidnapped for ransom. When the boss asks Billy to spy on a minor gangster they suspect of being an accomplice in the snatch, he refuses. The gangster is not a particularly close friend of Billy's, but he has backed Billy several times as a gambler, and, in the course of one night in the story, he probably saves Billy's life. Faced with two contrary claims on his loyalty, Billy's honor compels him to choose the nearer claim of the man who backed him. He sympathizes with the kidnapped son and his father, but he won't be a stool pigeon and a sycophant to the powers that be. The Democratic machine controls illegal gambling in Albany, and so it has an immediate control over Billy, whose livelihood as a gambler depends on tribute to the machine and on ready access to others who pay it. Now the machine closes Billy out of Albany's night life, driving him from its smoky bars and poolhalls to the frozen reeds along the banks of the Hudson. There the river spirits summon Billy to suicide, but he scorns their summons, leaving them only the tribute of his hat.

Books discussed in this article:
Legs, *Penguin, $3.95, paper*
Billy Phelan's Greatest Game, *Penguin, $5.95, paper*
Ironweed, *Penguin, $3.95, paper*

It never occurs to Martin Daugherty to invoke Sophocles, but I do so to make one point: that Billy's situation is a classical one. It has a structural similarity to the situation of Antigone, torn between the claims of public authority and her pious familial duty to her dead brothers. Logically, Billy's situation leads only to a tragic outcome as the human powers of the hero succumb to the larger powers of destiny which have been challenged by his honor. Actually, however, it leads to a comic outcome, because every turn in the plot is caused by some sort of *deus ex machina*.

The plot is set in motion when a local bowling champ has a stroke, and Martin picks three winning horses named (like the kidnap victim) Charlie. The plot is resolved when Billy makes a mistake about where the kidnappers might be found and turns out to be right.

In this contingent world, the hero's action gains our respect by its authenticity, but it achieves its victories by accident. Billy's trade is apt, because the gambler depends upon luck, invoking it as the Christian invokes God's grace to complete what individual virtues can only begin. Billy's world is a world without grace, but it takes Martin Daugherty's more highly developed sensibility to reflect on this absence of grace in a troubling image of Abraham and Isaac.

In the God of Abraham the Jews replaced the arbitrary power of the pagan deity with the humanly legitimate authority of a father. But a religion of filial piety must eventually deal with the fact that a father's authority can be the most arbitrary of all, partly because it reaches to our very consciences, as the pagan gods could never do. The story of Abraham and Isaac presents this dilemma in a palliative disguise. It separates the father's love (in the figure of Abraham) from his arbitrary power (the figure of God). Isaac relies on Abraham, but both he and Abraham must submit to God. The story's happy ending affirms the father's love, but it does so willfully, not out of any conviction that this is the way things must always turn out.

Kennedy adds a doubleness to Isaac to match that of the Abraham/God figure. Isaac, the sacrificial ram of the Hebrew tradition, becomes the satyr of the Greek tradition, the goat-child whose anarchic lust negates all authority. This figure haunts Martin Daugherty's dreams. When Martin symbolically violates his father's marriage bed with the actress, he is Isaac transformed vengefully to a satyr. The actress, remember, has taken the role of Martin's mother on the stage. Earlier, however, she had been his father's mistress, and so Martin's revenge against his father is an act on behalf of his wronged mother. To the extent that Martin realizes this, he objectifies and separates himself from the goat-child. He imagines the goat-child not as a participant in coitus but as a witness to it. And, on behalf of his mother, Martin's passion, like Abraham uninterrupted by the angel, consumes the goat-child.

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You can't tell the players . . .

All family histories become tangled in summary. The following list is intended to clarify the relationships in two families that dominate *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game* and *Ironweed*.

Michael Phelan, a railway worker in Albany in the 1890s, died in a switching car accident. He was the father of Francis.

Francis Phelan killed a scab in a trolley workers' strike in 1901, which sparked a lifelong pattern of running away. He married **Annie** and had two children, then ran off for good after accidentally dropping and killing his infant third son, **Gerald**.

Billy Phelan, Francis's second child, is a small-time gambler in Albany remarkable for his self-confidence and self-definition. To him Francis is only an unclear but cherished memory, until Francis's return in 1938.

Emmett Daugherty was a nineteenth-century Irish immigrant who became a firebrand labor leader and inspired the teenaged Francis Phelan with his militancy.

Edward Daugherty, his son, was a playwright who wrote a play in the 1920s about Francis's killing of the scab in the trolley strike. He is still alive in 1938, but his memory is lost to senility.

Edward's wife **Katrina**, a borderline psychotic, seduced Francis Phelan when he was still in his teens.

Martin Daugherty, Edward and Katrina's son, is a journalist who knew Francis Phelan from childhood and who knows and admires Billy Phelan.

Melissa Spencer, an actress who was the mistress of Edward Daugherty, acted in several of his plays, and was the subject of his most scandalous play describing their affair. Years later she has an affair with Martin Daugherty which she renews in 1938, the time of the novel.

The aftermath, however, is self-loathing, a radical distrust of all his motivations. This is the disabling legacy of the venerated father. The comparative clarity of Billy Phelan, which Martin observes and celebrates with a perception born of envy, seems to come from having had a failure as a father.

We engage that failed father in *Ironweed*. Francis Phelan's return home has already been woven into the plot of *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*. In *Ironweed* we first meet him in the St. Agnes Cemetery in Albany where, with other bums, he has a day's work topping off new graves with dirt. The cemetery holds his parents and his son, Gerald, who died on his thirteenth day, when Francis accidentally let him slip from his hands. In his shame Francis ran way from his family. That was twenty-two years ago, and now he returns for the first time.

I have said that Billy Phelan's world is a world without grace. Its problems and solutions resolve themselves into classical or Old Testament patterns. *Ironweed*, somewhat equivocally, invokes themes of the New Testament: expiation, forgiveness, redemption, the second chance that arises from something more mysterious than luck. Francis discovers that his wife, Annie, never told anyone in twenty-two years that he had dropped their son. He had been forgiven all along by her, and now he kneels to ask forgiveness at baby Gerald's grave.

Gerald is a prodigy in the land of the dead, possessed of the gift of tongues (even the tongues of animals) and swathed in a cocoon of spun silver. From his grave he calls on Francis to return home:

> Gerald, through an act of silent will, imposed on his father the pressing obligation to perform his final acts of expiation for abandoning the family. "You will not know," the child silently said, "what these acts are until you have performed them all. And after you have performed them you will not understand that they were expiatory any more than you have understood all the other expiation that has kept you in such prolonged humiliation. Then, when these final acts are complete, you will stop trying to die because of me."

This passage announces the theme and alerts us to look for the resonance of Francis's actions: his two ritual bathings, the gradual shedding and disintegration of his bum's clothes so that he can put on the out-of-date but still fresh clothing of the father that he was, the purchase of the propitiatory turkey that he presents to Annie, the cleanliness of which is first noted in a joke but then recurs as a metaphor for Francis's new state.

These gestures of transformation, of putting on "the new man," coexist with a carefully limited pattern of allusions to the *Odyssey*, the hero of which, we recall, returned from years of wandering to his home and his wife, Penelope, in the guise of a beggar. Like Odysseus, Francis confronts in memory a seduction by his own Circe, the wife of Edward Daugherty, who enchanted the sixteen-year-old with the splendidly baroque fantasies of her madness, visions of herself as a caged woman ripping him apart like a live rabbit with her teeth. Then, for nine years, Francis lived with Helen Archer, a hapless derelict Calypso whose failed musical career makes her something of a siren as well.

Francis's wife, Annie, can be compared with Penelope. Penelope's suitors are alluded to in a passing speculation by Francis about his wife: "Men must've come outa the trees after you." She answers: "They tried. But no man ever came near me. I wouldn't have it."

If Annie's faithfulness to Francis were the deepest truth about her, then the comparison with Penelope would be an adequate commentary, and we would still be in the classical, unredeemed world of *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*. Francis defined his guilt in the death of his son in the terms of that world. Bad luck had chosen him as the instrument of his son's death, and like a true classical hero, he defined himself as responsible and shamed, an outcast from his family. That's the way of classical ethics, and it is the way of Billy Phelan, whose essential ethical principle is that he always pays his debts.

But Annie is more than faithful. She is forgiving from the very moment of Gerald's death. She defines Francis's act in

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terms of his intentions rather than simply its consequences. The insight that enables her to see a good father, not an infanticide, bending over the broken body of their child enables her to recognize at once the returned father in the dirty bum standing on her doorstep twenty-two years later. Penelope, in contrast, is fooled by Odysseus's disguise as a beggar.

In *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*, the alternative to the classical ethic of Billy was the patriarchal Old Testament ethic of Martin Daugherty. Its symbols were Abraham with the sword held over Isaac, or in reflexive rebellion, of Isaac transformed from sacrificial ram to avenging satyr. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son can be thought of as a corrective commentary on the story of Abraham and Isaac. The father's forgiveness in the parable is as arbitrary, and therefore as mysterious, as God's earlier demand for sacrifice. After all, the prodigal son had only to show up, something his faithful brother resentfully points out. In the parable God and father, who were divided as Yahweh and Abraham, are reintegrated. Popular Christian piety took this a step further, seeing the forgiving parental aspect of God most clearly in Jesus' mother. Kennedy follows this in the figure of Annie, who welcomes the prodigal husband home simply because he showed up.

Francis confers the blessings of a father on his children. He sits down to a dinner with them, which Kennedy, in a particularly nice stroke, does not describe. He simply says that it happened and lets us conclude that its wonder consists in its being a reconstituted routine.

Then Francis leaves. Like the Odysseus figure of Dante and Tennyson, he gently turns aside Annie's suggestion that he could stay. He steps back into the bum's life, gets drunk, and reenacts the heroic murder that Edward Daugherty celebrated in his play. Instead of a scab, Francis's victim this time is an American Legion night raider who attacks a hobo encampment as part of a mob. Like the hurling of that smooth round stone that killed the scab, this killing, too, is an expression of Francis's athletic heroism: specifically, it is a home-run swing of a born baseball star which breaks the raider's back. Francis is once again on the run.

His act is a conscious assertion of his self-defined character and destiny: "he had fled the folks because he was too profane a being to live among them...to counter a fearful pride in his own ability to manufacture the glory from which grace would flow." He is "a warrior...never a victim" whose guilt is all he has left. "If I lose it," he concludes, "I have stood for nothing, done nothing, been nothing." This is the classical hero's stance; it is that of Oedipus at Colonnus. It is, *in extremis*, "the triumph of self-development" that Martin Daugherty celebrated in Billy Phelan. From the vantage point provided by Annie's freely offered forgiveness, however, it is something else. It fulfills rather precisely Dante's definition of damnation.

It almost seems as though this breaks Kennedy's heart and this is what makes the novel's final pages nearly defy interpretation. Everything that really happens is conveyed to us in conditional verbs. Everything that is merely a dream is conveyed with indicative verbs. What really happens is that Francis hops a freight out of town. What happens in a wishful dream—and in sentences whose very grammar tries to make the dream real—is that he returns to "the holy Phelan eaves" and the protective love of Annie.

The ending may tell us that Francis holds in his heart the hope of return. It may, on the other hand, tell us that the dream of return has supplanted the ghosts who have dogged his steps through Albany, and, like them, is irrecoverable. I don't know, and I am not sure that Kennedy knows. In *Ironweed* he is very much out on a limb. He denies himself the presence of a witty narrator/commentator, an educated Irishman with the gift of gab, that he had recourse to in *Legs* and *Billy Phelan's Greatest Game*. Here, Francis Phelan comes to us without the mediation of a Marcus Gorman or a Martin Daugherty. He cannot be distanced from us by their equivocating irony. Kennedy's hopes for him, expressed in an epigraph from Dante's *Purgatorio* and in a startling Dantesque paragraph on the last page about the empyrean, which "girds with light and love the primum mobile" and the entire universe, is at war with the author's sense of realism and his nostalgia for classical heroism and its choice of a tragic destiny.

This irresolution about Francis's character and destiny is accompanied by a more general rhetorical irresolution. The novel sometimes swerves into sentimentality (e.g., Francis's recollections of his courtship of Annie). Kennedy's attempts to give voice to the inarticulate make some passages read a bit like Faulkner on automatic pilot. But despite its lapses, *Ironweed* is peculiarly gripping. It confronts, in Francis, the reductive essence of the heroic ideal represented by Jack Diamond and Billy Phelan, the hero who is true to his transgression. That heroism is called into question and finally baffled by the subversive notion that a transgression can be forgiven. □

SCREEN

SOAPS & DREAMS

'IN THE MORNING' & 'FIELD'

See You in the Morning is called a "romantic comedy," but it is really offkey soap, notable only for the acting of Alice Krige (*Chariots of Fire, King David*). Krige plays a widow who gets involved with Jeff Bridges, a divorcee. Bridges (a shrink) has separated from Farah Fawcett (a fashion model), despite their two children; he meets Krige, a photographer with two kids and memories of a pianist husband who killed himself because a hand ailment left him unable to play.

That story might have yielded something important. Krige knows how to portray neurotic guilt, and her severe but beautiful face makes one want to comfort and encourage her. Her daughter (Drew Barrymore, more grown up than in *E.T.*) and son (Lukas Haas, from *Witness*) are also compelling. Haas uses

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his giant eyes to spark off spooky feelings. But the trio makes only half the tale.

The film, clearly an attempt to ride the home-movie craze, doesn't blossom. Fawcett has only been good when not a glamour girl. Bridges projects his usual annoying, unreliable energy. But he is also supposed to be an all-knowing observer of others' psyches, and he can't make convincing the combination of boyish nonsense and adult wisdom.

Still, the actors are less to blame than director Alan J. Pakula (*Klute, To Kill a Mockingbird, All the President's Men*) who also wrote the screenplay. Pakula explores nothing deeply; and his playfulness with time schemes and a family pet can't hide the thinness of the material. The movie goes through the motions of predictable infidelities and reconciliations. You get the feeling Pakula made *See You in the Morning* for some serious reason. Would that it were visible.

Another baseball movie? Not exactly. *Field of Dreams* relies on the sport, to be sure, but plays a larger game. It has none of the cheap comedy (cheers!) of the current *Major League*, none (alas!) of the racy blend of realism and romanticism of *Bull Durham*. Like *The Natural*, it sees baseball in mythic terms, but happily avoids awful bathos. Like *Eight Men Out* it focuses on Shoeless Joe Jackson, one of the Chicago Black Sox of 1919, and one of baseball's all-time beautiful losers. But this time it resurrects Jackson, in a corn field in contemporary Iowa.

The corn grows tall in the film's first scenes. Our faces are almost pressed against it as we watch the farmer (an ex-sixties' radical), Kevin Kostner, weeding it at midsummer. Director Phil Alden Robinson achieves a hyper-realistic look from the corn: it glows creepily, a clue that something weird is going to happen. The surprise is the strangeness of what occurs. One night a voice whispers to Kostner, "If you build it, he will come." The voice is never identified (not even on the closing credits); it's part of Robinson's strategy to preserve mystery by explaining (almost) nothing.

Kostner imagines that the voice is telling him to build a ball field over part of his corn. To the consternation of his neighbors, but not his supportive, spunky wife (Amy Madigan), he goes ahead. Lo and behold, the legendary Joe Jackson (Roy Liotta) literally materializes. Soon other older ballplayers show up too, all to realize some long frustrated dreams of their own. One is perfectly played by Burt Lancaster, with that bass trumpet voice still a delight to hear.

Field of Dreams, originally titled "Shoeless Joe" after the novel by W. P. Kinsella, is faithful to its source, an exercise in magical realism. No plot summary can do justice to its texture. No amount of argument is likely to persuade those who dislike the tone, or ostensible subject, baseball in America. It's the kind of film that either nauseates or works on its own terms. Despite rolling my eyes a few times, I wound up thrilled.

A single plot element illustrates the film's two main problems: hokey exaggeration and unnecessary misrepresentation. The "voice" gets Kostner to bring to Iowa a retired sixties' guru and now Boston recluse Terence Mann (James Earl Jones). In the novel, this was apparently J.D. Salinger. Changing this character's skin color in the film is important, yet when Jones mouths off an embarrassing ode about the all-American goodness of baseball, the film loses an opportunity to add honesty and significance. In Jackson's day, black stars had to compete in the Negro Leagues; baseball has only recently been colorblind. Touching on the race issue, say, by having a Negro League veteran show up in the corn field, could have strengthened the theme of fulfilling frustrated dreams. And, given recent sports scandals (including the new Pete Rose fuss), more honesty about Joe Jackson's errors in judgment would have been advisable. Social realism isn't required, just honesty.

The great strength of *Field of Dreams* is its lack of embarrassment over big things. The real theme of the film isn't baseball, or America, but sunny summer days spent with loved ones at some ideal house, a pathetic but oh-so-human imagination of heaven. After the ballplayers have left the corn field one last time, *Field of Dreams* pulls its biggest surprise. At the New York preview, there wasn't a dry eye left. The movie has no real end; it just turns visionary.

TOM O'BRIEN

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The formidable Fidel

TO MAKE A WORLD SAFE FOR REVOLUTION
Jorge I. Domínguez
Harvard University Press, $35, 365 pp.

Robert E. White

Cuba is a small country but it has the foreign policy of a great power. At various times over the past twenty-five years, Cuba has projected its power effectively not only into Latin America, but into Africa and the Middle East as well. U.S. policymakers have continually complained that Cuba mixes into the affairs of nations such as Ethiopia and Yemen where it has no conceivable security interests. To explain this seemingly irrational conduct, the State Department has cast Cuba in the role of the monkey who dances to the tune of the Soviet organ grinder. According to this interpretation, the Soviet Union sends Cuban troops into strategic areas to advance its own imperialist designs.

This image of Cuba as a simple surrogate of Moscow will not stand up to serious analysis. In response to the aggressive policies of the U.S., Cuba does frequently fill the role of the truculent upstart, Yankee-baiting, Soviet-parroting, emphasized by Washington. This image has crowded out the equally important reality of a country properly proud of its accomplishments at home and abroad, pragmatic, self-confident, and eager for a civilized relationship with the United States.

Since 1959, the destinies of Cuba have been guided by Fidel Castro. Asked to define a revolutionary, Castro gives us a self-portrait of the Fidel he wants the world to see: "Don Quijote's madness and the madness of the revolutionary are similar. . .the spirit of the knight errant, of righting wrongs everywhere, of fighting against giants." Romanticized and self-serving this image may be, but according to Jorge Domínguez's ground-breaking study, Cuba's foreign policy is inspired more by Castro's revolutionary vision than by Communist dogma or Soviet manipulation.

This assessment of Fidel Castro by the Cuban-born Domínguez squares with my own experience. Castro dreaming the impossible dream, playing David to our Goliath, has always explained more about the Cuban caudillo than categorizing him as a tool of Moscow. In the five long, intense, often combative discussions I have had with Fidel Castro, he has never quoted from the law or the prophets of communism, never mentioned Marx or Lenin, never lapsed into jargon of any kind. Undoubtedly, Castro is an adversary, but he is an adversary of impressive intellectual range and power. As Domínguez points out, Castro has near-total faith in his own capacities. He believes there is no subject beyond his mastery, no challenge that will not yield to his prescriptions.

Indeed, a good case can be made that Castro's talents and ambitions are too great for Cuba to contain, that they require a world stage and that under his guidance, Cuba has become the first developing country in history to play an important international role. Take, for example, the case of Angola. In 1975, Cuba sent its troops to rescue the beleaguered Marxist government reeling from the combined opposition of the U.S. and South Africa. Soon Cuba had 36,000 troops in Angola fighting both the U.S.-backed insurgency of Jonas Savimbi and, ultimately, South African troops. Fourteen years later, with the United States and the Soviet Union dancing in attendance, Cuban representatives negotiated a treaty which insures the survival of the Angolan government, spells finish for Savimbi's UNITA, moves South African troops out of Angola, and provides for the independence of Namibia.

Castro has suffered setbacks in his attempts to support revolutionary Marxist governments and movements throughout the third world, yet his overall record of success is impressive. As Domínguez points out, this is in large part because most of the revolutionary movements Cuba has supported have grown out of local conditions and did not, as in the case of the Nicaraguan *contras*, owe their existence to the initiative of a foreign power.

To Make a World Safe for Revolution delivers a coherent, unemotional, but powerful account of the development of Cuba's foreign relations since the Castro revolution. A quick summary might go as follows: Convinced that the U.S. would try to overthrow his government, Castro exaggerated his commitment to Marxism-Leninism in order to capture and hold Soviet support. Cuba accepted Soviet hegemony because it provided Castro with both the resources and the protection necessary to maintain his rule at home and advance revolution around the world. It would be a simpler world if Castro functioned as Moscow's puppet. In truth, it has been Cuba that has moved Soviet policy toward greater support for revolution. Castro's commitment to revolution is real but limited. He will not assist revolution against friendly progressive governments such as Mexico, nor will he criticize right-wing regimes that help Cuba, such as Franco's Spain. In response to official criticism from the U.S., Castro states that those who export counterrevolution have no right to demand that Cuba abandon rebels who seek to overthrow oppressive governments. Cuba, he insists, will accept the norms of international conduct provided the U.S. also abides by those same norms.

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What afflicts the United States in its dealings with nearby revolutionary states is not a failure of will, but a failure of analysis. A visitor to Cuba is struck by the state's monopoly of power, the lack of press freedom, and the absence of any guarantees of human rights. On the other hand, from a third-world vantage point, Cuba has forged a society where the health and education of the people are given first priority, where no one goes hungry, where there is work for all. It is a mistake to underestimate the power of the promise of economic and social transformation to the ground-down poor of countries where, too often, so-called democratic government acts as a device to frustrate authentic change.

Any intelligent policy toward the Caribbean and Central America must involve a change in our policy of attempting to isolate Cuba and destroy its revolution—a policy which has demonstrably failed. If we can deal rationally with Fidel Castro, then it may become possible to assess our security interests unemotionally and accurately throughout the entire region. We must overcome the temptation to regard Cuba as a mere outpost of the Soviet Union. Instead, we must make a determined effort to understand the complexities of the Castro revolution and its continued appeal to those who fight for change in Central America and elsewhere. There is no better place to begin than by reading this important work. □

INSIDE THE MITER BOX

ARCHBISHOP
Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church
Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
Harper & Row, $17.95, 256 pp.

William E. McManus

Archbishop, its author notes, is not a description of the "Spirit working in the church"; it is rather an attempt to describe "the people, processes, and structure through which the Spirit must work." This book tells us about the human side of the U.S. Roman Catholic church's thirty-one archbishops. They are hard workers, often workaholics, busy presiders over a heap of disparate ministries; public figures inside and outside church circles; dutifully accountable to higher church authorities; patiently and diligently solicitous for their priests' spiritual and physical welfare; bothered incessantly by the local church's persistent financial problems; over-advised by a multitude of boards and committees; often miffed by being taken more seriously than they take themselves; prone to eccentricities, foibles, and snap judgments; not unwilling to retire when the time comes.

Though *Archbishop* is subtitled: "Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church," its between-the-lines theme testifies to divine intervention's victory over human limitations and frailty in an institutional church expected to be a perfect reflection of Jesus Christ's teaching and ideals.

Writing "as a journalist who is a political scientist," Thomas Reese, S.J., has had the U.S. episcopacy as his newsbeat for several years. Neither iconoclastic nor obsequious, he is an experienced, competent, readable reporter of episcopal events and personalities (which, he says, are politically significant).

In this book, Reese takes his readers on a fairly interesting tour of the church's archdiocesan headquarters and for visits with the rather talkative people in charge. For most of the volume's journalistic scoops, he relied on over 400 taped interviews with archbishops, auxiliary bishops, vicars, chancellors, personnel experts, directors of education and of charities, business managers, and inner-circle secretaries. Unfortunately, no taped interviews were conducted with pastors, associate pastors, women religious, members of pastoral and finance councils, nor with knowledgeable individuals like work-a-day secretaries, receptionists, and night-shift charwomen who clean up the daily debris. The result is a somewhat lopsided report of the upper echelon's self-perceptions of its leadership role.

With candid-camera accuracy, Reese has exhibited archiepiscopal candor uncommon in prescripted proclamations. For example, Cardinal O'Connor of New York: "The archbishop of New York is foolishly expected to have an opinion on every subject in the world—I have to laugh as I reflect on my earlier days. I would come up with some kind of an opinion—I'd try to be honest about it and say what I believe. That got me into considerable trouble—I thought, 'why did I have an opinion about it in the first place? You really didn't have anything to say, and you said what you didn't have to say, and now you have to pay the price.'" (Say I to the cardinal in jest: "Keep up the good work!") Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee: "As a Benedictine, I thought diocesan priests liked individualism—'don't touch me, let me alone, let me do my own thing!' I didn't understand soon enough the enormous amount of strokes they need—so I mishandled the priests for a few years." Archbishop O'Meara of Indianapolis: "While money isn't everything, it's probably better than holy cards for paying people's salaries." How to keep Archbishop May happy?, his St. Louis priests asked. Answer: "Wine, women and song!"—the priests' reaction to the archbishop's advocacy of Communion under both species, women as lectors and eucharistic ministers, and liturgical music at most Masses.

Similar straightforward quotes from interviews with archdiocesan officers, particularly personnel directors, brighten many pages of dull narrative about the complexity and variety of archdiocesan administration. At times, the book comes dangerously close to being an almanac.

Readers, I think, may get the impression that most archbishops are too busy to be great. Indeed, the more personally they are involved in affairs of the home office,

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and the more devoted they are to the endless task of being all things to all people, the less likely will they be scholarly, influential, and charismatic leaders of the church. Always being busy seems to suppress God-given talent and opportunity for top-flight leadership.

Why were the incumbent U.S. archbishops chosen for their positions? Reese didn't ask them. Just as well, because they probably don't know, or, if they did, they wouldn't tell him or anyone else "on the record." Though I myself never climbed to the "arch," I have been a bishop for twenty-one years and to this day can only surmise why the late Cardinal Cody of Chicago selected me to be one of his auxiliary bishops. According to Reese and other authorities on episcopal appointments, the Holy See investigated me, drew a profile of my character and experience, checked out my orthodoxy and morals, and gave me an okay. No one, however, asked me whether I thought I was qualified. Good thing!

The ultimate absurdity in the present process is that the appointee may be the least informed about the reasons and expectations related to his appointment. Why? Secrecy is the absolute rule. No one consulted is allowed (under pain of serious excommunication) to confer with the candidate or to reveal to anyone what is reported. After a resident bishop (formerly called "the Ordinary") consults his priests about qualified candidates for the episcopacy, he can't give them the names of the persons they have proposed to him. After the archbishop of a province meets with his suffragan bishops to vote on candidates, he can't disclose his own first choices out of the group. The archbishop usually is not informed whether his choices were on the list which the pro-nuncio sent to the Holy See. Eventually the Vatican's Congregation on Bishops chooses candidates for referral to the pope. Rarely, if ever, does the Congregation interview the person it chooses. In the end, a priest or bishop becomes an archbishop without knowing whether many or none of his priests wanted him, whether his brother bishops had him high on their list or off it, whether the Congregation on Bishops really knew what he knew about himself, and whether the pope had even a vague knowledge of the appointee other than his having a "clearance" on "hot issues," like ordination of women, contraception, and "orthodoxy."

Surprisingly, Reese in his role as a political scientist doesn't analyze the appointment process in terms of political power. Secrecy, he might have observed, precludes accountability and vests power in the hands of the few persons with access to all secret information. I wish Reese would have explained whether this absolute secrecy is politically necessary in a hierarchical church within which, of course, the pope and he alone must have the final word on all episcopal appointments.

Published within weeks after the "summit" meeting of the U.S. archbishops and the pope, *Archbishop* deservedly should have a wide circulation. Oddly, a fundamental flaw in the summit meeting is also this book's main defect. Though the Holy Father has said that the U.S. archbishops at the Vatican meeting were "representatives" of the U.S. bishops, they were, in fact, his personal guests, chosen by him to speak for all the U.S. bishops (for the whole U.S. church). Even the U.S. spokesmen were selected not by the archbishops but by the Holy See. A truly representative group of U.S. bishops would have been either all or most of the elected officers and chairpersons of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops or a group of bishops elected by the body of bishops and accompanied by clergy and lay advisors from the U.S. bishops' national advisory council.

The "representative" bishops described in this book are all archbishops. I think Reese would have produced a much better book if he had interviewed either a structured cross-section of U.S. bishops or a random sample, including even some retired bishops who might have given him an earful.

After that pejorative comment about archbishops, I will say frankly that I might have been a better bishop if I had been required to report to a supervising archbishop, had profited from his direction and support, and occasionally had been inspired to see the church's big picture instead of gazing always at my own little domain. As it is, archbishops through no fault of their own generally are the weakest link in the ecclesial chain of command. Brothers they are, but big brothers they are not! □

A SCREEN ON THE UNPLEASANT

LATECOMERS
Anita Brookner
Pantheon, $16.95, 248 pp.

Thomas DePietro

Anita Brookner has never been a sob-sister. For all the quiet desperation in her novels of thwarted female passion—that describes six of her previous seven books—there is an artistic consciousness behind her vulnerable and pathetic heroines that's always in full control, and consequently more bemused than befuddled. As she did once before in *Family and Friends*, Brookner here concentrates on more than a lone and lonely woman; she nevertheless continues to traverse familiar terrain—the landscape of the inner self. In less capable hands, *Latecomers* would be suffocating, claustrophobic in its relentless examination of some decidedly minor lives. Nothing really happens here; little gets said. But before this slim fiction expends itself, Brookner has taken her four "latecomers" into their dotage, decades beyond the youthful traumas which shaped their later selves. And, just as importantly, she brings them through with wit and compassion, allowing readers to breathe freely of her mannered airs.

Thomas Hartmann and Thomas Fibich share more than first names: Both were

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sent as children to England from Nazi Germany, while their parents remained behind and were eventually killed. Meeting at a typically oppressive British boarding school, Hartmann and Fibich forge a bond that manages to transcend their differences, which compound over time. Simply, as we learn in the very first words of the novel, Hartmann is a "voluptuary," a hedonist with a religious devotion to "the perfecting of simple pleasures." A dandy and gourmand, he remains throughout most of his life "deliberately euphoric" as a way of screening out the unpleasant, the undesirable, and the unavoidable. Although he never rewrites the past, Hartmann never gives it much thought, and carries on with a certain insouciance.

Fibich, the darker of these "twin souls," is given to endless worry and woe. More learned and serious than his carefree friend and eventual business partner, Fibich is haunted by his past, which manifests itself in his bad dreams, his insomnia, and his constant stomach problems. Unlike the frivolous Hartmann, the melancholic Fibich spends more time analyzing his life than living it, though together these two refugees build a most successful photocopying business, and yoke their futures in an unusual way. Their strange symbiosis, which finds them inhabiting adjoining flats all through their married lives, conceals an implausibility. Why would someone of Hartmann's disposition, valuing the present above all else, carry along such a gloomy reminder of his mostly forgotten past? Does Fibich's example prove that you can't in fact ever escape the burden of memory? Hartmann, of course, asks himself no such questions.

Hartmann's and Fibich's disparate temperaments are reinforced by their choice of wives, two "old-fashioned" (to use Brookner's favorite adjective) women with semi-tragic childhoods but radically different sensibilities, who nevertheless manage to remain as friendly to each other as their husbands are. Christine Fibich would have been a nun, if she believed in God. As much a mother as a helpmeet to her hapless spouse, she is something of an "anachronism," clearly an admirable quality in Brookner's polite world since it implies all the lost virtues of the past—honesty, simplicity, and faithfulness. Yvette Hartmann, on the other hand, skitters along the surface of things, another version of Brookner's much-cherished "old-fashioned" woman, one who adheres to the "feminine codes" of pre-liberatory times—fastidious grooming, tasteful homemaking, and the promise of never changing. Her blissful ignorance of the actual circumstances of her childhood—her father was a French collaborator whom her mother abandoned—turns, much later in her life, into a pathetically comic rejection of the truth. And Hartmann finds her all the more charming on account of it, even though her prized figure has filled out, and age has registered its indelible marks.

Latecomers is more than a series of clever but static character studies. For one thing, Fibich continues throughout the novel to seek enlightenment, some form of spiritual illumination that will make sense of the horror underlying his past. After years of entertaining the notion, his search takes him back to Berlin, the scene of his primal abandonment. Though he inevitably fails in his quest—how can he experience true revelation without religious belief?—he arrives at some hard-won insight. After a lifetime of introspection, he discovers "that one's embrace may be turned outwards to the world in which one has made one's home." He recognizes "at last that his purpose in life had been not to find his own father but to be a father himself." All of which turns his thoughts to his only child, his grown son, Toto, by then a successful actor who throughout his life frightened his lackluster parents with his stunning beauty and charisma.

By comparison, the Hartmanns' only child, their pretty daughter Marianne, displays none of her mother's animation nor her father's *joie de vivre*. (Not surprisingly, the Fibichs prefer Marianne's quiet demeanor to their son's unabashed egotism, which of course the Hartmanns admire and encourage.) In adulthood, much to the Hartmanns' disappointment, Marianne has become bovine, a passive wife and mother, whose boring husband dictates a puritanical way of life completely foreign to his well-heeled in-laws. Meanwhile, Toto's adolescent hauteur evolves into something unpredictable: once prodigy and prodigal, he begins to show " the faint tracings of the melancholy that had so overwhelmed his father at the same age." His belated acceptance of his "mysterious and even dolorous inheritance" brings a "strange and dignified form of recognition" to his timorous parents. In short, he becomes "their apotheosis."

Many reviewers justly in awe of Brookner's elegant and graceful prose have rushed in to proclaim *Latecomers* a breakthrough in her development as a novelist, not just because her protagonist isn't a spinster—after all, that was true of *Family and Friends*—but because here her characters seem to triumph by will over adversity. However, one needs to resist taking Hartmann's cheerful refrain throughout the book ("Look! We have come through!") as proof that they have not merely survived, but have succeeded brilliantly at overcoming their "bad starts" in life. The only true "latecomer" is Toto, and what he's come to is a life as depressing in many ways as his father's. In other words, it seems to me that Brookner's generally bleak vision of things isn't seriously diminished here, though the richness of her observation and narrative skill

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might tempt one to think so. Consider the final ambiguous comment Fibich writes to Toto in the letter which ends the novel: "If I were a religious man I would ask God to bless you. And as I am not I will ask Him just the same." No, Fibich, like Hartmann, never transcends his past, nor does he arrive at any real understanding of it, he simply manages to survive in a world of disbelief. □

THE BODY IS STILL WARM

THE GRAND FAILURE:
The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century
Zbigniew Brzezinski
Charles Scribner's Sons, $19.95, 278 pp.

Wilson Carey McWilliams

Communism's rise and failure, in Zbigniew Brzezinski's telling, is a "historical tragedy," the story of high aspiration brought low, its hope for liberating justice become first cruelty, then deadening routine, and now caught in an "irreversible historical decline." T.S. Eliot, it would seem, is besting Lenin: the final conflict is shrinking from a bang to a whimper.

At bottom, Brzezinski's trenchant critique is an indictment of Lenin's conviction that revolutionary will, informed by Marxist science, can transform history's objectivities. It was Lenin who envisioned the state in which bureaucratic rationality would be fired by mass enthusiasm organized and directed by the vanguard party, a new regime which demanded the "withering away of society." Soviet apologetics to the contrary, Brzezinski is right in arguing that Lenin laid the foundations for Stalin's less graceful totalitarianism, resting on the pillars of ideology and terror. The subordination of democracy to revolution was the first principle of Soviet politics; willy-nilly, Gorbachev is not pointing to reform, but to a kind of counter-revolution.

Soviet repressiveness has, from the beginning, been a relatively open secret. Until the 1970s, however, it was at least possible to argue that Soviet harshness was justified by "historical necessity," since the Soviet Union was gaining on the U.S. in production and power. Since then the Soviet Union has fallen into very evident economic stagnation and, worse, it is losing ground to the West, and even more to Japan. Throughout the Soviet empire, the omelet no longer excuses the cracked eggs, and new discontents have been added to old disillusionments.

So far, Gorbachev has been able—or, as Brzezinski suggests, compelled—to argue that economic reform requires a new politics. A market economy, however, does not presuppose political democracy; Brzezinski concedes that in China, a stronger tradition of entrepreneurship may make it possible to combine economic reform with political repression. In the Soviet Union, there are those who murmur that the onset of economic decline was associated with the lessening of state terror: the quest for "socialist legality," initiated under Khrushchev, by offering modest security to the bureaucracy, provided a new basis for complacency. If Gorbachev falters, old-style totalitarianism will find new defenders.

In Brzezinski's view, while the Soviet Union probably cannot go back to the old order, it almost certainly will be unable to move toward political democratization. Reformers will encounter resistance from the bureaucracy, and the Soviet public—resentful, lacking the discipline of democratic practice, and harboring so many ancient and rival nationalisms—is only too likely to run beyond the restraints of prudence. One may hope otherwise: the Soviet "democratization from below" was altogether remarkable in the recent election, and a lesson to Americans on the value and possibilities of citizenship. Nevertheless, the popular desire for more consumer goods sits badly with the need for more saving and productivity; that dilemma, so far insoluble in America, may prove the nemesis of democratization in the USSR. At best, Brzezinski expects a few years of reform, followed by a return to bureaucratic stagnation, and he is betting with the odds.

Whatever the outcome, Brzezinski argues, Communist ideology has become "irrelevant," losing its hold on revolutionary hope. In Europe, this is now apparent. In the non-Western world, Brzezinski sees the appeal of communism as largely confined to Latin America (where Brzezinski has special worries about Mexico), and even there, it is weakened and discredited by the failure of Leninist regimes. Where it holds power, Brzezinski contends, communism will survive only to the extent that Communists, no longer guided by ideology, are willing to acknowledge that doctrine must follow and not rule events. Marxism, with its emphasis on objective forces and material conditions, is displacing Leninist activ-

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ism: twice, Brzezinski quotes Hu Quili's saying, "whatever benefits the development of productive forces is required or permitted by socialism." Similarly, Communist internationalism must accommodate itself to national cultures and priorities. Somewhere, Plekhanov, Lenin's old antagonist, may be enjoying a last laugh.

But while Brzezinski's case is compelling, it is dangerously monocular, like Romans exulting in the decline of Parthia and neglecting their own decay. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* ought to be read alongside Brzezinski's book, as a reminder that the economic problems of the Soviet Union have their counterparts in the United States. As debt devours savings and the economic thunderheads gather, it is worth noting that nothing would revive Communist ideology like a major recession in the West.

Moreover, I think that Brzezinski underrates the impact on external opinion of the limited democratization underway in Poland. Already, the contemporary reforms have shattered the argument that there is no difference between totalitarian ideologies, that Soviet Marxism is the moral equivalent of fascism. Clearly, there is a difference: the recent Soviet elections would never have been possible under Nazism. Marxist teaching is wrong, in my judgment, but even with its Soviet distortions, it entails a modest democratic impulse, as Brzezinski observes when he speaks of the collision between the "official myth of social egalitarianism" and the practice of "socialism for one class." Changes within the Soviet empire remind us that myths matter; teaching works no instant transformations, and it never eradicates the Old Adam, but at the slow pace of human learning, ideas do affect peoples and nations. And political moods are pendular. In Europe and America, audiences—middle-class people, enjoying the West's liberties and comforts—are crowding to see *Les Misérables*, enchanted by its message that revolutionary hope, so often naive and terrible, is also somehow imperishable. □

THE CHURCH AT WAR WITH ITSELF

PEOPLE OF GOD
The Struggle for World Catholicism
Penny Lernoux
Viking, $19.95, 466 pp.

Scott Mainwaring

Penny Lernoux's previous book, *Cry of the People* (Doubleday, 1980), focused on the significant changes the Latin American Catholic church underwent in the aftermath of Vatican II and was optimistic about the prospects for continuing change. The decade since it was published, however, has witnessed the bolstering of conservative groups within the church, not only in Latin America, but in world Catholicism as a whole. *People of God* is a detailed journalistic account of the new conservatives, moderates, and progressives. Lernoux's book is the first major work from a radical or liberal perspective that has attempted to put all of the pieces together and analyze the Wojtyla reign for what it really is. Her basic argument is that this papacy represents a major effort to roll back many of the reforms initiated by Vatican II and impose a more hierarchical, closed, authoritarian, and conservative model of the church.

John Paul II himself defies easy description. He has adamantly battled national bishops' conferences that struggle for greater autonomy, theologians who do not toe the Vatican line, and lay initiatives that seem excessively autonomous. He has supported conservative movements such as *Opus Dei* and the Italian-based Communion and Liberation; has defended the most traditional of sexual moralities; has opposed any significant movements of women into leadership positions in a male-dominated institution; and has overwhelmingly preferred conservative priests in selecting new bishops, archbishops, and cardinals. In many ways he is a throwback to the conservative Piuses of this century, except that he is far more charismatic than any of them. But John Paul cannot simply be dismissed as an atavistic reactionary—though he may be on some issues—and it is to Lernoux's credit that she does not do so. For he speaks against human rights abuses in conservative regimes as well as in socialist ones, criticizes liberal capitalism, and defends the poor. Nevertheless, Lernoux argues convincingly that the occasional progressive measures are greatly overshadowed by the pontiff's conservative proclivities on most issues. Part I of her book briefly summarizes the period of recent innovation in the church (1958-1978) and provides an overview of John Paul II's tenure.

In the struggle over world Catholicism, Latin America and the United States have become the foremost battle camps, and to these camps Lernoux devotes Parts II and III of her book. The proper nature of religion and its linkages to politics have been hotly contested in Latin America since the historic 1968 General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops' Conference, held in Medellin, Colombia. Since the Sandinistas took power in 1979, the church's role in Nicaragua has been particularly controversial. Initially supportive of the overthrow of Somoza, the Nicaraguan hierarchy began by April 1980 to criticize the revolutionary government, initiating a crescendo of hostilities between church and state. Influenced by his experiences working under an oppressive regime in Poland, John Paul II feared that once again a socialist government would repress the Catholic church. His sharp criticisms of the Nicaraguan revolution and of the "popular church" that supports it have been predicated upon this belief. Intent upon silencing forces they perceived as hostile, the Sandinistas have done their part to ensure that conflicts with the church escalated.

While the Nicaraguan case has drawn the most attention, the conflict between progressives and conservatives in Brazil may have more enduring significance. Since the mid-1970s, the Brazilian hierarchy has been the most progressive in the

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world. It courageously criticized human rights abuses and economic policies during the latter part (roughly 1970 until 1985) of the country's military rule, and it spawned grassroots innovations that go beyond what one finds elsewhere in the Roman Catholic church. Since the early 1980s, the pope has taken countless measures to inhibit further progressive "excesses" in Brazil; Lernoux pays particular attention to the controversy surrounding renowned liberation theologian Leonardo Boff. She also discusses the conflicts in the Peruvian and Chilean churches, which have also been prominent in defending human rights and promoting ecclesiastical innovation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Dutch church was the progressive innovator among first-world churches. After the Dutch church was squelched by a host of Vatican measures, the United States church became the major innovator in the advanced industrial democracies. Episcopal positions and documents on Central America, nuclear weapons, and the U.S. economy have provoked considerable controversy. The support most U.S. Catholics express for reforming church doctrine on sexual mores also has contributed to minor skirmishes between the Vatican and the U.S. church. Lernoux argues compellingly that the sanctions against Seattle's Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen and theologian Charles Curran must be understood in the light of a broader Vatican design to control this somewhat rebellious flock.

The final part of the book is something of a hodgepodge. One chapter looks at conservative religious movements that have spread throughout Europe, the United States, and Latin America during the past decade. We have interesting accounts of the Knights of Malta; *Opus Dei*; Communion and Liberation; Tradition, Family, and Property. That John Paul II has generally supported these extremely conservative movements says a great deal about his predilections.

The breadth, extensive research, and insights make this book a major journalistic achievement. Lernoux has properly looked at the problem on a world level, has dealt convincingly with many of the major aspects of "the struggle for world Catholicism," and has brought fresh information to a major issue of our times. The book's most pleasant surprise is a sense of balance not always found in *Cry of the People*. This balance is particularly evident in the discussion of Nicaragua, which judges the Sandinistas quite critically on several scores while also taking religious conservatives to task.

Some editing problems slightly detract from the book's central message. The chapter on Protestant sects is not particularly compelling and does not fit with the over-all focus of the book. The chapter on the Nicaraguan church would have been better placed in Part II, on Latin America, rather than Part IV. A brief section (pp. 77-80) on the United States appears in a chapter on Latin America, rather than where it belongs (with a similar discussion in chapter 7). The book could have been shortened somewhat without losing anything.

And, of course, there are some debatable interpretations. Lernoux usually correctly insists on the good motives of

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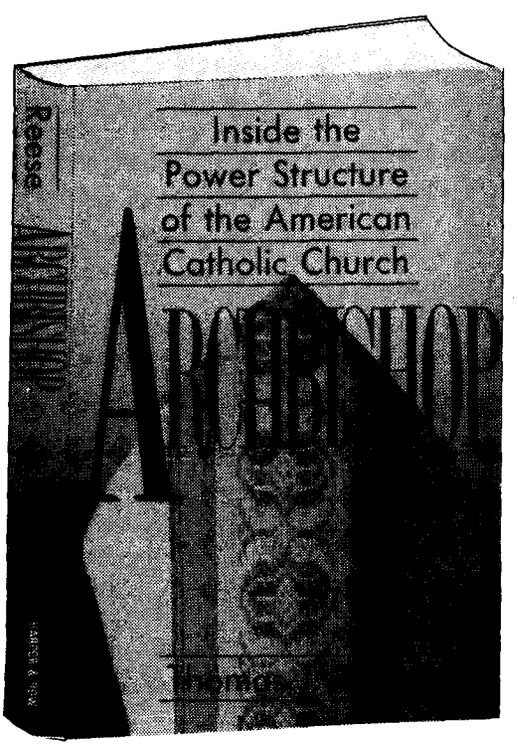

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Recent years have produced an upsurge of interest in the reemergence of religion in American politics. But what is lacking, contends Robert Booth Fowler, is a theoretical exploration of the symbiotic relationship between religion and American "liberal culture," namely, the American political idealism that has its basis in eighteenth-century common-sense realism and democratic individualism. Fowler begins by taking a careful look at various strains of two main theories about the relationship between religion and American liberalism. Believing that neither captures the present situation properly, Fowler proposes that religion indeed supports liberal culture, but only in an indirect and unintentional way. It does so by providing many Americans with desired beliefs and practices that liberalism no longer offers; religion also provides community and fills up modern liberalism's moral void by addressing matters of ultimate meaning and value.

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Catholic conservatives, but elsewhere she falls into caricatures ("Ratzinger thought poor Latin Americans stupid and easily misled"). Lernoux never seriously considers whether the conservatives' arguments have any merit. She is too quick to accept the sometimes misleading self-characterizations of radical Catholics in Latin America—as democratic, as opposed to Marxism, as anticlerical. Some radical Catholics are all of these things, but others are authoritarian in their personal styles, clerical, and wedded to a strange yet common mixture of populism and Leninism. Generally speaking, Lernoux is better in analyzing the Catholic right than in her discussions of the Catholic left. She also overgeneralizes somewhat about the Latin American church. Only in a handful of countries did ecclesiastical reform go as far as she indicates; elsewhere, continuities were more pronounced than reform, and in a few countries (Argentina) most of the hierarchy is reactionary. Finally, Lernoux may be too optimistic in her appraisal that "there is an inevitability in the forward march." In fact, much of the book compellingly shows that conservative interventions can effectively squelch previous change.

Given the book's reach, these are relatively minor points. Many critics will take Lernoux to task for judging the current pope and his coterie too harshly, but the book's outstanding merit is that the author is usually correct, if often mordacious, in her assessment of John Paul II's reign. As Lernoux concludes, "John Paul's church has built a wall around itself and only one commander is allowed to speak for the rest. Those who criticize the papal line are subjected to Vatican investigations, interrogations, censorship, and dismissal. John Paul is marching backwards, and those who will not follow his direction have been told to leave the church." □

INSIGHTS AS WELL AS DISTORTIONS

CATHOLICISM AND THE RENEWAL OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY
George Weigel
Paulist Press, $11.95, 218 pp.

Dennis P. McCann

Inside George Weigel's new book a formidable contribution to the tradition of Catholic social teaching is struggling to be born. But the labor is unusually protracted and difficult, because its author cannot resist engaging in a mean-spirited form of neoconservative polemics that entirely undermines the proposal he wishes to make for the renewal of American Catholicism. If Weigel keeps on like this, he runs the risk of being dismissed as the Newt Gingrich of American Catholic theology.

At its best, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy* seeks to walk the path marked out by John Courtney Murray, whose work is not as neglected by other American Catholic theologians as Weigel seems to think. The Murray project, of course, does not simply insist upon religious liberty as the centerpiece to an authentically Catholic understanding of human rights, but also provides, especially in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (1964), a powerful analysis of the current condition of public moral discourse in these United States. Like Murray a generation ago, Weigel is disturbed by the low estate of public moral discourse, and wants to rehabilitate the Catholic natural law tradition as the appropriate "grammar" for framing social and political issues for debate in what he hopes will become a "civil public square."

Weigel's plea on behalf of natural law, and his occasionally brilliant applications of his framework to a variety of social issues, should not be dismissed. Murray sees this framework, not primarily in terms of its negative associations with the minutiae of post-Tridentine Catholic moral

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casuistry, but in terms of its convergencies with certain basic assumptions regarding human nature and civil society governing the Founding Fathers' constitutional design for the American republic. Though Murray and Weigel may be guilty of wishful thinking in finding continuity between the political theologies of Thomas Aquinas and, say, James Madison, still there's enough of an affinity upon which to build a distinctively American Catholic appropriation of the natural law. As Murray and Weigel persuasively argue, if it didn't already exist, we'd have to invent it.

Weigel's recovery of the Murray project self-consciously addresses a situation far more tempestuous than the one that Murray faced in the calm before the storm of Vatican II. Though Weigel is often at his polemical worst in analyzing the causes of our current predicament, he is surely right in recognizing that "the fault lines in the current religious debate over the right ordering of American public life do not run along denominational lines." The religious and ideological differences are probably as wide and deep among American Catholics today as they are among American Protestants or Jews. This lack of consensus within the religious communities is mirrored by the even more disturbing levels of moral confusion and cultural illiteracy characteristic of American society. Weigel rightly understands that the greatest single challenge facing the renewal of the Murray project is the apparent triumph in our public life of the "emotivism" so tellingly analyzed in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). Unlike other Catholic and Protestant theologians—Stanley Hauerwas being the most impressive among them—who have used MacIntyre as permission to abandon a "naked public square" in order to concentrate on defining and reinforcing the distinctively biblical identities of their own religious communities, Weigel pointedly refuses to give up on the possibility of a truly civil society engaged in public moral discourse.

In a manner designed to evoke Murray's *We Hold These Truths*, Weigel tries to show the continued promise of the natural law tradition by suggesting how six public arguments might be reconstructed, each one currently stalled in a condition of ideological "gridlock" within both the church and the larger society. The results of his demonstrations are mixed at best, but each of them is truly worth considering, if one can see beyond the polemics to the actual proposals. Among these are Weigel's analysis of the contemporary state of the question on church-state issues, his reformulation of the debate over abortion legislation, and his understanding of democratization within the struggle for third-world development. Perhaps the least polemically encumbered is his analysis of "the quest for peace and freedom" after the bishops' pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace" (1983).

The brief statement given here is superior to Weigel's lengthier *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Social Thought on War and Peace* (1987), upon which it is based. For it makes a case for the so-called "just war tradition," and points out—and this, I believe, is Weigel's most important substantive contribution

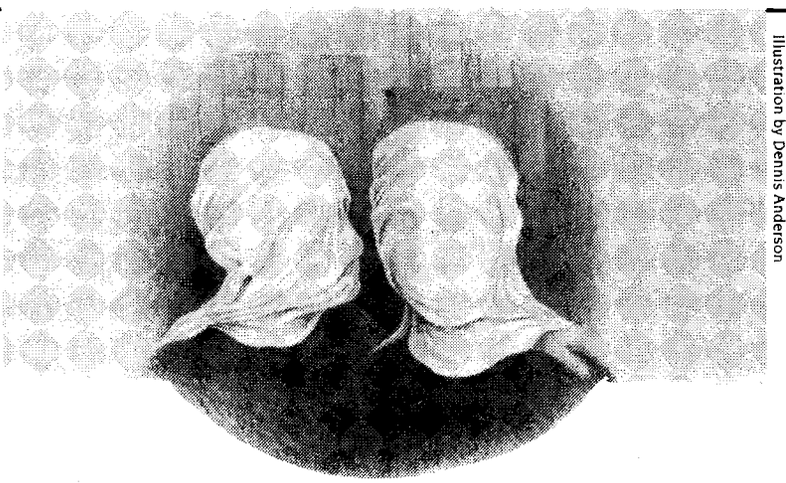

Illustration by Dennis Anderson

The noblest of loves. A grievous sin.

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Such have been the views of homosexuality in various cultures at various times. In this work of unprecedented scope, David Greenberg identifies the features in each society that produce the beliefs on which attitudes toward homosexuality are constructed. His goal is to explain why episodes of discrimination and repression have occurred and why, at certain points in history, they have stopped occurring. With the rise of gay liberation movements, controversy about homosexuality has intensified, and Greenberg not only exposes the roots of this controversy but shows why it is likely to persist.

The Construction of Homosexuality

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to the debate—that this branch of the natural law tradition entails a distinctive theory of "peace as rightly ordered, dynamic political community." Hence, the politics of peace inevitably includes not just consciousness-raising about economic development and human rights, but inevitably must consider constitutional questions regarding the kind of public order in which such development is likely to occur and in which such rights are routinely to be respected. The question of democratic governance is hardly peripheral to an authentically Catholic commitment to peacemaking.

Weigel has equally challenging points to make about the ideology and politics surrounding the morality of abortion. Though his position on the morality of abortion is predictably close to that of the right-to-life movement, his attempt to renew the debate within the context of the Murray project yields fresh insights. Among them is his refusal to make common cause with Hauerwas and James T. Burtchaell, who would focus attention away from what's left of the public square toward intrinsically religious considerations. Hauerwas and Burtchaell may be more successful in giving committed Christians good reasons for renouncing recourse to abortion, but their theological strategies will tend to disqualify them from having any effective impact on the legislative arguments that are likely to occur if *Roe* v. *Wade* is amended or overturned. Moreover, Weigel launches a well-targeted challenge to the allegedly "liberal" character of the prochoice ideology. He argues that *Roe's* lack of concern for the unborn halts, at least temporarily, the historic "expansion of the community of the commonly protected—the communities for which we claim, as Americans, a common responsibility." On the other hand, he warns prolife advocates not to hold out for "a publicly actionable consensus on an absolute proscription of abortion." Even significant progress in limiting abortion-on-demand, Weigel says, could help "recreate the cultural climate of public hospitality in which arguments against the 'hard case' resort to abortion can be more effectively mounted." Here, too, one discerns Weigel's Murray-like realism about how the cultural and political conditions necessary for authentically public moral discourse actually are secured.

So much for the promise of Weigel's attempt. I wish I could be more enthusiastic about this book, for I find Weigel fundamentally sound on the points just discussed. The problem is that his descriptions of the current predicament of American Catholicism are often so outrageously distorted and viscerally provocative as to make it almost impossible to keep one's mind firmly fixed upon the contribution he seems capable of making. Weigel would like to define a new "vital center" for the American Catholic community, beyond the current confusions and animosities generated by nearly a quarter century of severe stress, post-immigrant church and post-Vatican II. But rather than healing polarizations within the community, Weigel's polemics tend to intensify them. It's not just that Weigel self-righteously takes it upon himself to denounce the "cheap grace" of (mostly left-wing) Catholic social activists. It's worse. Consistent with the kind of selective quotation and slanted historical interpretation that all but disqualifies *Tranquillitas Ordinis* from serious consideration, Weigel seems to go out of his way to deny the moral standing and intellectual integrity of those with whom he disagrees. The same kind of mean-spirited injustice he did to Dorothy Day in his previous book, he does this time to the Adrian Dominicans. Not only does he take a cheap shot at their declaring their mother house a "Nuclear Free Zone," but by contrasting them with the Lithuanian victims of religious persecution in the Gulag Archipelago, he would have us believe that they are a terminal embarrassment to all right-thinking Catholics.

Similarly, he attacks those American Catholic theologians who have voiced public criticism of Pope John Paul II. Weigel notes that virtually all of them initially welcomed the opening of the new pontificate, but then he cleverly goes on to juxtapose recent comments, notably from Richard McBrien and William Shea, ut-

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Coming
Paul Baumann on (gasp!) post-modernism

tered at the height of controversies over Vatican interventions in, for example, the Seattle archdiocese and the Curran case at Catholic University, with George H. Williams's earlier and more appreciative analysis of *The Mind of John Paul II* (1981). My point is not that McBrien and Shea are right about the pope or that Williams is wrong, but that in making the comparison without due regard to changed circumstances, Weigel's remarks tend not so much to invite us to public moral dialogue, as to a heresy trial. Not surprisingly, Weigel employs some of the traditional methods of the Inquisitors, such as his ludicrous attempt in a pyramid of innuendo to discredit McBrien and the Catholic Theological Society of America through guilt by association with Mary Daly. Weigel implies that because McBrien and "ideological feminists" like Daly tend to agree that "the single most serious issue facing the Catholic church today is that of sexual equality," they somehow must share a common agenda on other matters. Weigel can't resist invoking Murray to justify his attacks upon Catholics who disagree with him. With a heavy-handed irony that Murray himself would hardly have found congenial, Weigel implies that the "New Nativism" that Murray vigorously opposed in Paul Blanshard's *American Freedom and Catholic Power* today finds its most insidious supporters in the editorial offices of *The National Catholic Reporter*.

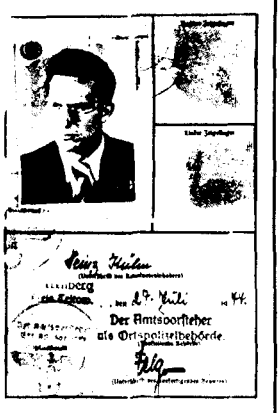
Why does Weigel treat his fellow Catholics this way—many of whom over the years have made at least as many important contributions to the development of Catholic social teaching as he? I believe that there is a fundamental misperception at stake here. Weigel has swallowed Peter Berger's analysis of the alleged ascendancy of the so-called "new class." Berger writes of "the rising importance of the 'knowledge industry' in the developed world" by which—in what amounts to a caricature of Marxist dialectics—production has given rise to a class of communicators, educators, and government bureaucrats, whose self-interest is furthered by the expansion of governmental power in American life. Weigel asserts that after Vatican II, American Catholicism fell victim to a "new class" of its own which controls the church, especially its postures toward public policy questions, through a network of newly formed diocesan and national "justice and peace" bureaucracies. Whatever the partial illumination afforded by this perspective, what I find most disturbing is the way it gives permission to those who adopt it to engage in "class struggle," no-holds-barred. When Weigel attacks the Adrian Dominicans, or McBrien, or *The National Catholic Reporter*, there's nothing personal to it. He's just attacking a class that has entrenched itself within the church to maintain its own unjust domination.

Finally, one does not have to be a John Courtney Murray to recognize just how subversive of public moral discourse such a "class struggle" can be. Of course, Weigel and Berger may be right. In which case, like others engaged in ideological combat Marxist style, they inevitably must break

Mixed Blessings

An Almost Ordinary Life in Hitler's Germany

Heinz R. Kuehn



"An affecting memoir. . . . What made Kuehn 'almost ordinary' was that he was half-Jewish and half-Catholic in a land where either half might have been sufficient for condemnation. Instead, Kuehn was able to mix into the society, having been granted one of those ghastly Nazi designations: 'Mixed Breed of the First Degree.' . . . An artfully written work that depicts a life lived quietly within the drama of battles and politics"—*Kirkus*.

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David D. Cooper

It is possible to doubt whether I have become a monk (a doubt I have to live with), but it is not possible to doubt that I am a writer, that I was born one and will most probably die as one. Disconcerting, disedifying as it is, this seems to be my lot and my vocation—Thomas Merton.

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a few eggs in order to produce an omelet. But among the eggs to be broken will be resources, as yet unpolarized, that still exist within the community, resources that could have contributed to renewing or creating for the first time a civil public square.

As I see it, then, the public theologian in George Weigel is still to emerge. If Weigel really wants to advance Murray's legacy, he would do well to reconsider the ideological biases, as well as the sheer mischief, inherent in the "new class" hypothesis. Then, he will find, as Murray's other admirers, including David Tracy, have discovered, that there's more than enough work to do simply on the philosophical foundations of public moral discourse, and their appropriation within the assumptions governing a public theology adequate to the challenges facing American Catholicism. Though such intensive theological reflection may not be as emotionally rewarding as "class struggle" appears to be, it provides a more secure foothold on Murray's path toward a truly civil society. □

ONCE IN A BALKAN VILLAGE

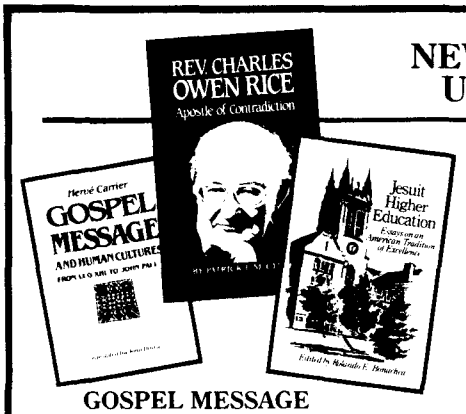
SHADOW PARTISAN
Nadja Tesich
New Rivers Press, $9.95, 215 pp.

Peggy Ellsberg

Shadow Partisan is an unusual, hypnotic first novel by a Yugoslavian-born author. Its narrator is the wise child Anna, innocent, stubborn, hectoring, observant. She addresses us with conversational familiarity, and we enter quickly the detailed, immediate world of Anna's childhood in an unnamed Balkan village at the end of World War II. Grandma begins by saving the child, clutching her blue baby blanket, from cruel German soldiers; Mother saves both Grandma and Anna when the house is bombed and they are buried in the rubble. After that, pictures of Marx and Lenin are hung on the walls of the kindergarten, and the children clench their little fists, shouting slogans. The "peasant" kids, who make many appearances in this absorbing recital woven of homespun folklorica, strands of overheard talk, and unmatched threads of political events, come to school wearing long thick braids tied with pieces of brightly colored wool. Anna watches the peasant girl at the desk in front of hers, as lice crawl slowly over the part between her braids. "You hear it when she kills them on top of the desk with her thumb, it goes 'sploush.'" Social reality is relieved, however, by the ancient consolations of folk practice. Public signs command: "Don't spit on the floor! Avoid TB!" Old women say: "Spit three times for good luck!"

> Spring is just starting in the leaves, pale green, pale blue sky. We build a large fire out of dead wood, and burn winter to death. Then when she is all gone, we dance around the fire and chase each other in the woods, look for violets until night falls. We are celebrating the old Slavic god, Vesna, god of spring, one of many. It is for her that we burn the winter doll and eat the food from UNRA and make crowns out of violets and leaves.

On the one hand, Anna likes Russian films and stories about the Partisans. On the other hand, she is immersed in a timeless demotic culture where Slavs are blond (like herself and her missing father) and Turks, who occupied the country for five centuries, are dark (like her mother and baby brother). "Turks," however, are bad—Grandma once defended their home by beaning five huge, mustachioed Turks with an iron skillet. Gypsies are good luck—they are colorful and musical, and it is spiritually prudent to leave food for



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them on the graves of the recently deceased. Religious feasts blend with exotic pagan customs:

> By Easter the sound of bees is everywhere, cherry trees bloom, a new one every morning when you wake up. We hardboil eggs with different plants to get different colors, onion makes them a deep yellow shade, tree bark brown. With the eggs ready, run out on the street, take your egg, hold it in your fist, and tap the egg of the person holding his, always with the pointed end. If your egg cracks, you lose it....

In this village, saints' days are assiduously observed. Women pay long, frequent visits and study the future in coffee grounds, knit and embroider, discuss childbirth, make the sign of the cross. "I shall never become a woman, never!" Anna insists repeatedly.

One day she is playing outside with the boys, near an old house bombed during the war. They find a remarkable object, "large like the largest goose egg, wonderful colors it had, yellow, green, red." The boys pound on the object with stones, trying to discover what might be inside. Anna is accompanied throughout the novel by a private, semimystical voice that commands her, "Look, remember, there is nothing but this!" The voice seems to tell her what to do. As the boys pound on the large, metallic egg, something makes her move away. "Then there was much light and a roaring sound and screams. . . . Chedo lost both arms and a leg, Boris an eye, the other two died right away, on the spot."

Summer out on the farm with Grandpa and the peasants; winter sledding through the main streets of the village, which is buried for months in snow; old people wrapping their shoes in rags so they won't slip on the ice; the gypsy circus; the women talking, talking, talking. An apparently artless stream of everydays, connected only by the voice of the narrator, flows from one season to the next.

At one point, in the randomness of time that characterizes childhood and its narrations, the pictures of Stalin come down from the walls, there are no more red flags, and the new word around the coffee table is "Cominform." Anna's little brother reads "a comic strip, a new thing since we broke up with the Russians." And suddenly, packages containing nylon raincoats, coffee, bathing suits, and fountain pens begin arriving from Anna's missing father, and eventually he pays for their passage to America. The book ends with Anna, her mother, and her brother embarking on the journey to America "where wars never happen" and where "no one is poor or sick."

Nadja Tesich is currently a professor of film at Brooklyn College. As a graduate student at the Sorbonne she starred in Eric Rohmer's film, *Nadja à Paris*. In this, her first novel, she narrates the terrors of war, the arrival and departure of communism, death and birth with the same tone and timing as the memory of a picnic or of washing the clothes. Her technique is a mélange of Euro-realism, folk tale, and oral history, and in a story told remarkably without the usual conventions of plot and suspense, Tesich manages to keep the reader engaged with exotic detail and compelling first-person intimacy.

Shadow Partisan left me less with the feeling that I had read a novel than that I had seen something cinematic, or rather, something like a beautiful, grainy, old movie on a very small screen. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 290)

points to the self-defeating nature of attempts to consolidate papal power. For centuries, popes have acted the most autocratically when they felt the most threatened. Yet, time and again, extreme authoritarianism has ultimately led to weakening of the papal office, and an even greater loss of power and respect than was originally feared. The promulgation of *Humanae vitae* and the subsequent hard line on artificial birth control taken by John Paul II is a well-known case in point. Certainly Paul VI went against the recommendations of his own birth control commission because he feared that change would cause faithful Catholics to ques-

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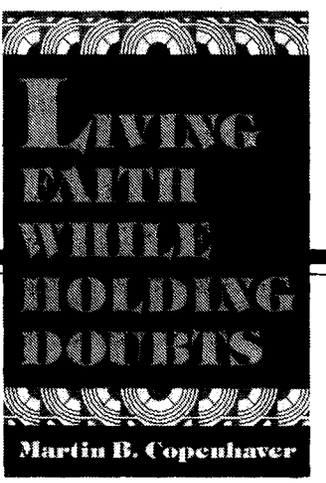

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tion the authority of the magisterium. But twenty years later, and to a great extent because of *Humanae vitae*, dissent has become a way of life for many American Catholics. Now, the word has come down to parish priests to begin to emphasize the doctrine in their ministries, at a time when a recent study of low morale in the priesthood cites unrealistic pronouncements on human sexuality as a major cause for alienation between priests and laity.

Kaufman's timely book offers a history for beleaguered Catholics who dissent from a range of authoritative teachings, yet who want to remain within the church they love. And it is in times like these that such people are needed, in return, by the very church that seems to spurn them.

MARGOT E. FASSLER

Harris & abortion

Phoenix, Ariz.

To the Editors: As a woman-mother-Christian-physician, I was touched by the possibilities for the church raised by the ordination of a woman bishop ["When the Spirit Leads: Barbara Harris, Bishop," March 10]. Yet one deafening silence echoed throughout the article: Harris's support of abortion. The pregnancy dyad presents us with two patients. Our inclusive community must embrace both mother and unborn child. Failure to do so represents one more face of oppression.

DEBORAH M. HEATH

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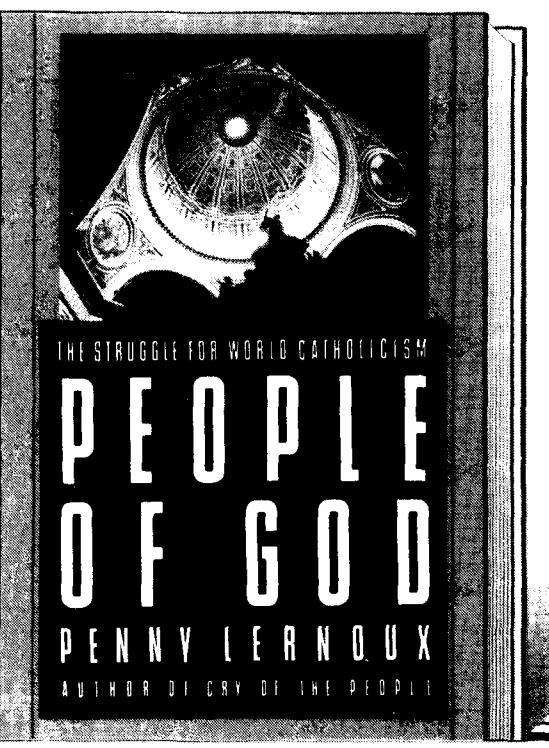

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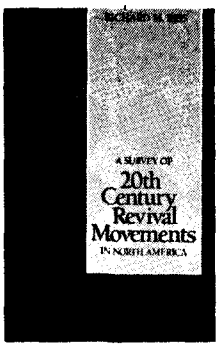

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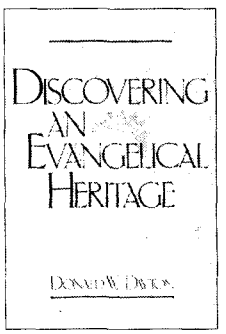

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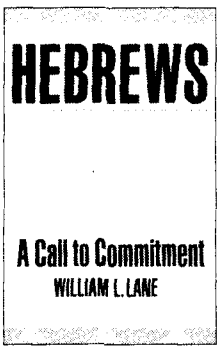

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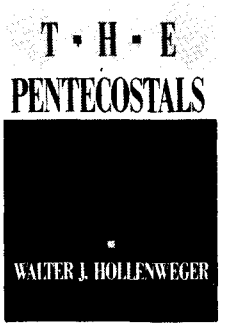

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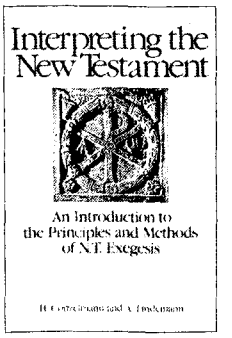

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